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Orel

КНИГА  
В СОХРАННОСТИ ✓

# Orel

The July Battle 1943

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## **EVENING COMMUNIQUE OF THE SOVIET INFORMATION BUREAU**

*July 5, 1943*

*This morning, July 5, our troops in the Orel-Kursk and Belgorod directions engaged in heavy fighting with large enemy infantry and tank forces, which, supported by large numbers of aircraft, launched an offensive. All the enemy's attacks have been repulsed with heavy losses, and only in some places have small detachments of Germans succeeded in penetrating our defences to a slight degree.*

*According to preliminary reports, our troops in the Orel-Kursk and Belgorod directions have in the course of the day's fighting damaged and destroyed 586 German tanks. In air fighting and by anti-aircraft artillery 203 enemy aeroplanes have been brought down.*

*Fighting is continuing.*

# ORDER

## OF THE SUPREME COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

*TO ARMY GENERAL ROKOSSOVSKY*

*ARMY GENERAL VATUTIN*

*COLONEL GENERAL POPOV*

Yesterday, as a result of the successful operations of our troops, the July German offensive from the regions south of Orel and north of Belgorod in the direction of Kursk was completely liquidated.

On the morning of July 5, the German fascist troops, consisting of strong forces of tanks and infantry supported by numerous aircraft, launched an offensive in the Orel-Kursk and Belgorod-Kursk directions.

The Germans hurled into the attack against our troops their main forces, which had been concentrated in the regions of Orel and Belgorod.

As has now become apparent, the German High Command put into the field: in the Orel-Kursk direction—seven tank divisions, two motorized divisions and eleven infantry divisions; and in the Belgorod-Kursk direction—ten tank divisions, one motorized division and seven infantry divisions.

Thus, the total enemy forces taking part in this offensive amounted to seventeen tank divisions, three motorized divisions and eighteen infantry divisions.

Concentrating these forces on narrow sectors of the front, the German High Command counted on being able by means of concentric drives from the North and South, in the general direction of Kursk, to break through our defence and surround and exterminate our troops situated on the arc of the Kursk salient.

This new German offensive did not take our troops unawares.



Army General Konstantin Rokossovsky

«БЕЛСТАТ»



Army General Nikolai Valutin



They were ready not only to repel the German offensive, but also to strike the Germans heavy counter-blows.

At the price of enormous losses in men and material the enemy succeeded in penetrating our defence in the Orel-Kursk direction only to the depth of nine kilometres, and in the Belgorod-Kursk direction only to the depth of fifteen to thirty-five kilometres. In the course of fierce fighting our troops wore down and bled the crack German divisions, and in subsequent determined counter-blows not only repulsed the enemy and recovered the positions they had occupied up to July 5, but also pierced the enemy's defence and advanced in the direction of Orel for a distance of fifteen to twenty-five kilometres.

The battles that took place in the process of liquidating the German offensive revealed the high standard of fighting efficiency achieved by our troops, and the unexcelled stubbornness, staunchness and heroism of the men and commanders of all arms of the service, including artillery and trench-mortar men, tankmen and airmen.

Thus, the German plan for a summer offensive may be regarded as having utterly failed.

This explodes the legend that in summer the Germans are always successful in an offensive, while the Soviet troops must be in retreat.

In the fighting that took place in the process of liquidating the German offensive the following troops distinguished themselves: the troops under the command of LIEUTENANT GENERAL PUKHOV, LIEUTENANT GENERAL GALANIN, LIEUTENANT GENERAL OF TANK TROOPS RODIN, LIEUTENANT GENERAL ROMANENKO, LIEUTENANT GENERAL KOLPAKCHI, LIEUTENANT GENERAL CHISTYAKOV, LIEUTENANT GENERAL OF TANK TROOPS KATUKOV, LIEUTENANT GENERAL OF TANK TROOPS ROTMISTROV, LIEUTENANT GENERAL ZHADOV, LIEUTENANT GENERAL SHUMILOV, LIEUTENANT GENERAL KRUCHENKIN, and the airmen of the Aircraft Units commanded by COLONEL GENERAL OF THE AIR FORCE GOLOVANOV, LIEUTENANT GENERAL OF THE AIR FORCE KRASSOVSKY, LIEUTENANT GENERAL OF THE AIR FORCE RUDENKO and LIEUTENANT GENERAL OF THE AIR FORCE NAUMENKO.

During the fighting from July 15 to 23, the enemy sustained the

following losses: killed—over 70,000 men and officers; damaged and destroyed—2,900 tanks, 195 self-propelled guns and 844 field guns; destroyed—1,392 aeroplanes and over 5,000 automobiles.

I congratulate you and the troops under your command on the successful liquidation of the German summer offensive.

I express thanks to all the men, commanders and political personnel of the troops under your command for their splendid fighting services.

Eternal glory to the heroes who have fallen on the battlefield in the fight for the freedom and honour of our Motherland.

*J. STALIN*

*Marshal of the Soviet Union  
Supreme Commander-in-Chief*

*July 24, 1943*

# ORDER

## OF THE SUPREME COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

*TO COLONEL GENERAL POPOV  
COLONEL GENERAL SOKOLOVSKY  
ARMY GENERAL ROKOSSOVSKY  
ARMY GENERAL VATUTIN  
COLONEL GENERAL KONEV*

Today, August 5, the troops of the Bryansk front, assisted on the flanks by the troops of the Western and Central fronts, as a result of fierce fighting, captured the City of Orel.

Today, also, the troops of the Steppe and Voronezh fronts broke the enemy's resistance and captured the town of Belgorod.

A month ago, on July 5, the Germans launched their summer offensive from the regions of Orel and Belgorod with the object of surrounding and annihilating our troops in the Kursk salient and of capturing Kursk.

Frustrating all the enemy's attempts to break through to Kursk from Orel and Belgorod, our troops passed to the offensive and on August 5, exactly a month after the Germans launched their July offensive, captured Orel and Belgorod.

This explodes the legend circulated by the Germans that the Soviet troops are incapable of conducting a successful offensive in the summer.

To mark this victory I order that the 5th, 129th and 380th Rifle Divisions, which were the first to enter the City of Orel and liberate it, be given the name of "Orel Divisions" and that henceforth they shall be called the 5th Orel Rifle Division, the 129th Orel Rifle Division and the 380th Orel Rifle Division.

The 89th Guards Division and the 305th Rifle Division, which were the first to enter the town of Belgorod and liberate it, shall be given the name of "Belgorod Divisions" and henceforth be called the 89th Guards Belgorod Rifle Division and the 305th Belgorod Rifle Division.

Today, August 5, at midnight, the Capital of our Motherland—Moscow—will salute our gallant troops which have liberated Orel and Belgorod with twelve salvoes fired from 120 guns.

For their distinguished services in the offensive I express my thanks to all the troops under your command who took part in the operations for the liberation of Orel and Belgorod.

Eternal glory to the heroes who fell fighting for the freedom of our Motherland.

Death to the German invaders!

*J. STALIN*

*Marshal of the Soviet Union  
Supreme Commander-in-Chief*

*August 5, 1943*



Army General' Markian Popov

АБОНЕМЕНТ



Colonel General Vassily Sokolovsky

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# The Liquidation of the German Orel Place d'Armes and the Capture of Orel and Belgorod by the Soviet Troops

Statement by the Soviet Information Bureau, Published August 7, 1943

As a result of stubborn offensive operations, the troops on the Bryansk front, assisted on the flanks by the troops of the Western and Central fronts, routed the crack units of the German army which the German High Command had concentrated in the region of Orel, liquidated the enemy's Orel *place d'armes* and on August 5 captured the City of Orel, which had been in the hands of the German invaders for nearly two years. That same day, August 5, the troops of the Steppe and Voronezh fronts pierced the enemy's front and captured the town of Belgorod.

This entire operation, brilliantly executed by the Red Army in conformity with the plans of the Supreme Command, can be divided into two stages:

1. The successful liquidation by our troops of the summer offensive launched by the German fascist troops on July 5, this year, in the Orel-Kursk and Belgorod-Kursk directions with the object of surrounding and annihilating the Soviet troops in the Kursk salient and of capturing Kursk.

2. The Red Army's successful offensive in the Orel and Belgorod directions, which culminated in the defeat of the enemy's Orel and Belgorod groups and in the capture of Orel and Belgorod by our troops.

## THE FIRST STAGE

### The Failure of the German Offensive in the Orel-Kursk and Belgorod Directions

In the morning of July 5, strong enemy tank and infantry forces, supported by numerous aircraft, launched an offensive in the Orel-Kursk and Belgorod directions. On the previous day Hitler had issued an order in the course of which he stated that "the German army is commencing a general offensive on the Eastern front," that the blow which the German troops were to strike "must be of decisive impor-

tance and mark a turning point in the course of the war," and that "this will be the last battle for the victory of Germany."

In the course of this "decisive offensive" the German army lost a vast number of men, tanks, guns and aeroplanes, but it failed to achieve not only strategical but even tactical success. Moreover, our troops, after demolishing the enemy divisions which were hurled into the attack, themselves delivered a powerful counter-blow at the attacking enemy army. By July 17, the Soviet troops operating in the Orel-Kursk direction had already recovered the positions they had occupied at the beginning of the German offensive, *i.e.*, before July 5, 1943. The Soviet troops operating in the Belgorod direction, developing their counter-offensive, on July 23 reached the line which they had occupied before the Germans launched their offensive, *i.e.*, before July 5, 1943.

Thus, the summer offensive of the German troops, on which the Hitlerites had placed such great hopes, failed. The Red Army exposed the fable circulated by the Hitlerites to the effect that summer is the season of success and victory for the German army, whereas in the summer the Soviet troops must find themselves in retreat.

In their fruitless attempt to capture the Kursk *place d'armes* and thereby create the conditions for an offensive from the Orel *place d'armes* against Moscow, the German fascist troops, in the period from July 5 to 23, lost 2,900 tanks, 1,039 guns—of which 195 were self-propelled—1,392 aeroplanes, over 5,000 automobiles, and over 70,000 men and officers killed.

Thus ended another of Hitler's reckless throws.

## THE SECOND STAGE

### The Soviet Troops' Successful Offensive in the Orel and Belgorod Directions

The Soviet troops not only frustrated the Germans' summer offensive, but themselves launched a determined offensive against the enemy's army groups situated in the Orel salient and in the region of Belgorod, and inflicted heavy defeat upon them.

The German High Command had attached enormous importance to Orel. The Hitlerite generals had regarded Orel as a *place d'armes* for an offensive by the German troops against Moscow, and also as a bastion of the German defence on the Central sector of the front.

During the twenty-two months they had been in occupation of Orel the Germans had converted the Orel *place d'armes* into a formidable fortified region and had erected deeply echeloned strategical



defensive fortifications resting upon numerous aquatic lines. Only a few days ago the German press and radio proclaimed that Orel was a symbol of the impregnability of the German defence.

On July 12, the Soviet troops situated north, east and south of Orel, launched a determined offensive in the general direction of Orel. The German High Command ordered its troops who were defending the Orel salient not to retreat a single step and to fight to the last man. In the region of Orel reinforcements continually arrived from Germany, and troops were hastily called from other sections of the Soviet-German front.

Executing the orders of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, the Red Army, despite torrential rains and spoilt roads, overcoming the stubborn resistance of the enemy, steadily advanced, pierced the entire depth of the German defence lines and on August 5, after heavy street fighting, captured the City of Orel.

On August 4, our troops in the Belgorod direction passed to the offensive, pierced the enemy's defence, and inflicting heavy defeat upon him, captured the town of Belgorod.

During the fighting in the Orel direction, in the period from July 24 to August 6, and in the Belgorod direction in the period from August 4 to 6, our troops wiped out over 50,000 enemy men and officers and destroyed 1,100 aeroplanes, 1,705 tanks, 584 guns of all calibres, and 6,000 automobiles.

The total losses inflicted on the enemy by the Red Army during *one month's fighting* in the Orel and Belgorod directions from July 5 to August 6 amount to the following: killed—120,000 men and officers; damaged and destroyed—tanks 4,605; guns 1,623; automobiles 11,000. Aeroplanes brought down—2,492.

During this period our troops *captured*: tanks—521; guns of different calibres, including self-propelled—875; machine guns—2,521; stores of (different kinds—325. German men and officers taken prisoner—12,418.

Thus, executing the plan of the Supreme High Command, the Red Army, in the course of one month's fighting, liquidated the German offensive against Kursk, inflicted heavy defeat upon the German fascist groups of crack troops, liquidated the enemy's Orel *place d'armes* and liberated Orel and Belgorod from the German invaders.

The failure of the German summer offensive and the defeat of the German troops at Orel and Belgorod show that in the summer the Red Army is capable not only of retaining but also of developing the gains it achieves in an offensive.

The hopes of the Germans and their satellites of a favourable turn in the course of military operations in the summer have now utterly collapsed.

This exposes the fable circulated by the Germans to the effect

that the Soviet troops are incapable of conducting a successful offensive in the summer.

The Red Army's successful military operations have riveted on the Soviet-German front all the main forces of the Hitlerite army, have deprived the German High Command of the opportunity freely to manœuvre with its troops, and, thereby, have created still more favourable conditions for the development of the offensive military operations of our Allies on the continent of Europe.

Such is the summary of the month's summer fighting on the Soviet-German front.

*SOVIET INFORMATION BUREAU*



Army General Ivan Konev



A heavy machine gun supporting a night attack by Soviet troops

MIKHAIL BRAGIN

## The July Battle

When operations ceased at the close of last winter's campaign, the configuration of the front near Orel and Kursk was rather peculiar. East of Orel it represented a salient thrust into our lines, whereas to the west of Kursk it represented a salient thrust into the enemy's lines. This created two *place d'armes*, which provided both sides with opportunities for conducting offensive operations, and laid both sides open to the danger of double flank attacks from the South and North.

As Marshal Stalin stated in his Order\* to the troops on the Orel-Kursk front of July 24, the German High Command "counted on being able by means of concentric drives from the North and South, in the general direction of Kursk, to break through our defence and surround and exterminate our troops situated on the arc of the Kursk salient."

In the calculations of the German High Command, this operation was to have determined the subsequent course of the war. At all events, by severing the Kursk salient, the Germans would have safeguarded the right flank of their Orel salient, and what was most important for them, would have safeguarded their route to the Donetz Basin. By removing the Kursk salient they would have shortened their line on this sector by two-thirds; they would have obtained the possibility of manœuvring freely on the Orel-Kharkov railway, and would have secured for themselves a *place d'armes* for subsequent operations in an easterly direction. Aiming to surround our troops at Kursk, the Germans wanted to seize the initiative and to impose their will upon our Supreme Command. The success of the Kursk operation would have shown that the Germans were still capable of achieving success in the summer; it would have strengthened the confidence of the Germans in the possibility of achieving victory and, finally, it would have demonstrated the ability of the Hitler High Command to arrange a "German Stalingrad" for the Russian troops.

\* \* \*

Every officer who was capable of analysing the strategical situation was aware of the possibilities and dangers that were inherent in the

\* See page 4.

Kursk salient; and the German High Command could have had no doubt that the Red Army would not surrender it without a stern and determined struggle. But the Germans counted on being able to break the Red Army's resistance by means of a series of blows struck by large masses of troops. The topography of the area permitted the employment of tanks in mass formation; the roads led to Kursk, and it was necessary to cover a distance of only 180 kilometres, which, compared with the 500 to 600 kilometres that were covered in 1942, seemed a feasible task. The salient formed by the line at Kursk provided the opportunity of repeating the Cannæ experiment, for which the Germans have quite a craze.

The main idea underlying the plans of the German generals was that of massing large forces for a concentrated blow. This is what they have been taught by Schlieffen. This is the method by which Ludendorff intended to decide the issue of the first World War when he called upon Germany to put "every ounce of strength" in the blow. This is what the German generals wanted to achieve against us in the present war. They strove to muster a preponderance of forces in the direction of their main drive. Stinting neither men nor material, they made a thrust on a narrow sector of the front in an endeavour to penetrate deep into our defence and convert a tactical success into a strategical one. They succeeded in this, at the price of tremendous losses, in 1941 and 1942. They hoped to do the same in 1943. But in 1941 the Germans attacked on a front of 3,000 kilometres, and in 1942 on a front of 500 to 600 kilometres. This time, however, they attacked from Belgorod and from Orel on a front of 50 to 60 kilometres, with the object of capturing Kursk. Into this attack they hurled the great bulk of their tank divisions.

In the Orel-Kursk direction alone they hurled into battle seven tank divisions, two motorized divisions and eleven infantry divisions. Their attacks were supported in the air by massed aircraft forces from aerodromes adjacent to the front and also from distant bases. These massed air attacks were made several times a day. The Germans placed such confidence in the weight of their blow also because it was to be backed by their "T-VI Tiger" tanks and "Ferdinand" self-propelled guns, whose sudden appearance in the field for the first time was intended to have a particularly astounding effect upon our troops. Mostly, the German High Command relied on the strategical suddenness of their blow.

\* \* \*

The course of war usually reveals the enemy's strength and the general trend of his plans. To avoid being taken by surprise, the other side must foresee the direction of the enemy's main drive and ascertain the disposition of his reserves, and of his tanks in particular

which are indicative of the aggressiveness of his designs. The other side must also have information about the new types of weapons the enemy possesses and, chiefly, ascertain the time, the hour the enemy intends to launch his attack. All reconnoitring forces are concentrated on this task. Cases in the history of war illustrate how this knowledge enables the other side to frustrate an offensive that has taken months to prepare. But the history of the first World War shows that Germans were able on more than one occasion to keep the time they had fixed for an offensive a profound secret and to take the other side completely unawares.

The preparations, or rather, the struggle for success in the battle of Kursk began long before the battle started. Guided by Stalin's counsels, the Soviet Command in the Orel-Kursk direction drew up a variety of plans for active defensive operations to meet different contingencies. Strong and deep defence lines were erected. The infantry built up an entire system of fortifications and dug in very deeply. The anti-tank defence was based on massed artillery forces and formidable mine barriers. The defence was an active one, the tanks being kept deep within the defence lines. The troops were put through a course of hard training for the forthcoming operations. Every man was aware of what Stalin had demanded of him in his orders; every commander did his utmost to get these orders carried out. Training went on day and night. The men were trained individually, in platoons, companies and battalions. Every man and unit was put through the severest tests; tactical exercises were organized. All conventionality was cast aside. The men were trained to perform what would be required of them in the course of actual fighting. The infantry erected fortifications and learned how to defend them. The tanks learned how to storm these fortifications and, in the process, "steam-rolled" the infantry, crossing their trenches over their heads. The Soviet Command followed the example of Suvorov, who, in training his troops before a battle, ordered his cavalry to charge the infantry. It adopted Suvorov's maxim: "Hard on the training ground, easy on the battlefield."

This training was one of the most important ingredients of our victory. It gave our men a knowledge of, and therefore confidence in, their weapons; hatred of the enemy multiplied their potency.

The Supreme Command of the Red Army prepared for defensive operations, as if yielding the initiative to the enemy. But this is how Kutuzov, having complete confidence in his troops, "yielded" the initiative to Napoleon at Borodino, only to wear down the latter's forces and then defeat them. That is how Alexander Nevsky "yielded" the initiative to the Knights of the Teutonic Order in the historic "Battle on the Ice" on Lake Peipus, confident that his centre would withstand the onslaught of the German "pig's snout," as the spearhead of the German formation was called. In fact, that spearhead was held

fast by the Russian defence, while the bulk of the forces of the forbears of the present-day fascists were routed on the flanks.

In preparing for defence and for the subsequent counter-offensive, the Supreme Command of the Red Army took all measures to ensure success.

One of the most important measures it took was thorough reconnoitring. Inspired and keyed up by Stalin's orders, the Soviet scouts operated actively and unremittingly. The enemy did all in his power to counteract them. Sometimes, after long and intense operations by air scouts, and by the heroic land scouts who penetrated into the enemy's rear and dragged "tongues"—as our men call the German prisoners they capture for information purposes—literally out of their trenches and dugouts, it seemed that the plans of the enemy group and the time it intended to launch its attack were clear. But later it all turned out to be the other way round. Instead of preparing to attack, the enemy strengthened his defences and re-grouped his forces. This gave rise to the most contradictory assumptions.

By dint of thorough Staff work our Command saw through the enemy's ruses, delved down to the truth and then tried to work out as near as possible the exact time the enemy had fixed for his attack. But once again all calculations would be upset because . . . the German High Command itself did not know exactly when it would launch its attack! Circumstances called for an attack, but the Germans were haunted by the recollection of the disasters they had suffered at Moscow and Stalingrad. Nevertheless, they were compelled to attack, because delay undermined the confidence of the German people in their "Führer"; it put a strain on the nerves of the German soldiers and sapped their fighting spirit. As German prisoners have testified, the "Führer" had first ordered that the troops be ready for an offensive in April. Then he put it off until May, and finally he put it off until June. Troops were hastily transferred to the base of the Kursk salient; all signs went to show that an offensive was in preparation. Suddenly, preparations for defence were undertaken, and the troops which had been called from the rear were sent back again. But this did not cause our scouts to relax their vigilance; they persevered in their intense activities. At last, barely perceptible signs indicated that the German offensive would commence in the beginning of July.

An important factor in the task of ascertaining the time the enemy has fixed for launching his offensive is reconnoitring in every form. A curious incident occurred on one sector which provided the Soviet Command with most valuable information. Our Command had ordered a "tongue" to be procured. Captain Kolessov, the commander of a reconnoitring company, detailed a strong scouting party to procure one. Three methods of operation were drawn up: the men were to make a sudden raid on the enemy firing position on Height X, or, protected



by their greatcoats and rain capes, they were to make a bold dash through the enemy barbed wire entanglements into the enemy's lines under cover of our artillery fire. If these two methods failed, the men were to break through the enemy's barbed wire entanglements at another spot and reach his positions under cover of a smoke screen. They had a fourth method of operation in reserve, namely: in the event of the enemy being encountered in "no man's land," each group was to act on its own initiative according to the circumstances. It so turned out that the last method was acted on.

- On a sultry night in July the scouts pushed forward into the enemy's positions, determined to carry out their assignment, come what may. They were led by Lieutenant Ivan Milesnikov. The "kidnapping group" was led by Sergeant Major Andrei Ivanov, assisted by Corporals Fedor Semyonov and Alexander Guzinin.

"In a hollow in the central zone," Andrei Ivanov related later, "we spotted a group of Germans and allowed them to come into close range. When they had got close enough, Lieutenant Milesnikov commanded: 'Forward! Fire!' and made a dash for the fascists, followed by Semyonov, Guzinin and myself, hurling grenades at the Germans. The fight was hot but short. We were prepared for anything. We would have drawn our knives if need be to get our quarry. 'Have you got a Heime?'—I shouted in the dark. 'Yes,' came the reply. It was Lieutenant Milesnikov's voice."

Here Corporal Guzinin butted in and said: "I hastened to my commander's assistance. The German was struggling like the devil, but we soon quietened him."

The story was then taken up by Corporal Semyonov. "Knowing that I am a Siberian, and pretty tough," he said, "the boys handed the German over to me, and I had to carry him all through 'no man's land.' It was a heavy load, but it turned out to be a valuable one. I did not suspect that I was carrying a 'despatch' stating the time the Germans had fixed for launching their offensive."

The "despatch" was sent to Headquarters and there opened. The "tongue" began to talk and stated that he with a party of sappers was making for "no man's land" to remove mines so as to clear a passage for tanks which were to launch an attack a few hours later (at dawn on July 5).

\* \* \*

Two hours before starting their attack the Germans commenced a heavy bombardment of our lines with the object of exterminating our troops in the forward positions, wrecking our Staff Headquarters, cutting our communications, and paralysing the control of the operations, but chiefly with the object of crushing our anti-tank defences

and the batteries deep within our lines which were covering the line of advance of the tank columns.

But barely had the first salvo of the German batteries rung out than our batteries, comprising a large number of guns, began to hurl their metal at the enemy.

Weeks before the battle opened our artillerymen had spotted and found the ranges of the enemy's guns, and now, by sheer weight of metal, they demolished more than half his batteries and then transferred their fire to his troops mustered at their starting positions, waiting for the signal to attack.

Our guns broke up the enemy's formations, paralysed his leadership and prevented him from methodically attacking our defences. This counter-bombardment protected our defences from the German artillery, and this, primarily, saved our anti-tank batteries, which had important consequences in the subsequent fighting against the enemy's tanks. The roar of our guns had a depressing effect upon the enemy camp, but the spirits of our men soared. The fighting conditions changed abruptly at the very outset of the battle.

The Hitler High Command ordered its troops to attack. It could not do otherwise. It was pressed into doing so by the weight of the forces it had concentrated here. Counting the number of troops the Germans had mustered in the Orel-Kursk direction, together with all their equipment and food supplies, and knowing the carrying capacity of the railways in their immediate rear, one cannot escape the conclusion that had the German High Command abandoned the offensive they would have had to spend many weeks in transferring their troops to new positions. But the main thing was that they still relied on the weight of their blow, the more so that the Germans do not as a rule attach primary importance to the preliminary bombardment of the enemy's positions. In their plans they relegated the function of the preliminary bombardment to their tanks and self-propelled artillery. It was on their "Tigers" and "Ferdinands" that the Germans banked. "Germany has provided us with weapons which will bring us victory," Hitler had declared. The Germans hurled themselves upon our lines.

This was an onslaught of tremendous force. The Germans attacked from Orel on a front of approximately thirty kilometres, but they concentrated their main tank forces on a front of approximately ten kilometres. In addition to infantry and aircraft, there were seven tank divisions, and batteries of self-propelled guns, each as formidable as a tank and in number equalling another three tank divisions! A tank division on every kilometre of the front! There were more German tanks operating here than had operated in the whole of Poland, and three times as many as Guderian had had in his Tank Army which attacked Moscow in 1941.

The German tank attack was accompanied by an air attack which

in the first days of the offensive was conducted at the rate of 3,000 plane flights per day. In spite of this, however, the Germans failed to gain superiority in the air. Our airmen and our anti-aircraft batteries inflicted heavy losses on the enemy aircraft.

The infantry in our first line of defence, supported by artillery, trench mortars, sappers and aircraft, stood up to the blow, and heavy fighting ensued. The German tank divisions suffered heavy losses. Their infantry was cut off and wiped out. But the German High Command kept urging their troops on, and they pressed forward leaving a trail of thousands of corpses and scores of burning machines. The German tanks forced their way through our infantry lines and reached our second line of defence, but they did not pierce our first line of defence; they merely dented it in the direction of their main drive. Our defence on the rest of the front remained unshaken; our first line infantry was not wiped out. Under the impact of this tremendous onslaught our infantry retired to the second line of defence, retaining its fighting efficiency and continuing to fight.

On the second day the fighting was resumed with greater ferocity than ever in the tactical depth of our defence. Our artillery inflicted crushing blows on the enemy tanks. In mortal combat with "Tigers" and "Ferdinands" our heroic artillerymen posted on the hills between Kursk and Orel made good use of the successes achieved by the workers in our munitions industry. They released a veritable tornado of metal and set fire to and battered hundreds of enemy tanks.

The German generals continued to urge their men forward. They revived the strategy employed by Ludendorff in the first World War known as the "buffalo strategy." This had brought them success in the first stage of the present war, but they had failed to learn that although correct in itself, the principle of massed forces is not always applicable and cannot be applied to every kind of defence. They still failed to understand the character and firmness of our defence, still underrated it, and verily like buffaloes, kept pressing forward to the hills sustaining tremendous losses. From the summit of these hills a view is obtained of the surrounding country for scores of kilometres to the South and North. Parallel with them run the Kursk railway and highroad. Whoever commands these hills commands the entire countryside.

This region lies between the Don and Ukrainian steppes and the Moscow Region forest, and reflects the beauty of both. Here the needle of the compass swings wildly round the dial and is drawn not northward, but downward, indicating that beneath the fertile black earth lie the largest iron deposits in the world, known as the "Kursk Magnetic Anomaly." The Germans stretched their paws towards this bounteous region as far back as 1918. They nearly reached it last year, but were driven back. Now they were making another desperate attempt

to lay their hands on the soil, the iron ore and the lives of our people of this region. From Kursk and the surrounding villages the fascists drove into slavery in Germany 29,381 people. They burned the villages, reduced the towns to ruins. The monuments over the graves, the obelisks over the spots where the Germans massacred our people are at the same time a call for vengeance and a danger signal.

The enemy has not abandoned his plans. His tanks press forward with greater vigour, his aircraft continue to scour the skies. The wind disperses the dust clouds and like a mirage, through the shimmering heat, tanks appear again, their turrets floating above the waves of rye and wheat like the deck-houses of ships at sea. The tanks are followed by the German motorized infantry in frog-green uniforms. They received a severe drubbing yesterday and now they are asking for more; they are still confident of success.

But now our tanks have taken up their positions among our infantry and artillery. They counter-attack the enemy the very moment the fighting commences. The Germans advance with "Tiger" tanks and "Ferdinand" self-propelled guns in front and on their flanks. Lined up in open rectangular formation, with the base facing our lines, the "Tigers" and "Ferdinands," taking advantage of the longer range of their guns engaged our tanks at a considerable distance. The rest of the German tanks followed inside the rectangle. It looked for all the world like a naval engagement. But from the very outset our heroic tankmen came to close quarters with the enemy and robbed him of his advantage. Approaching to within 100 and even 50 metres of the enemy tanks, and taking advantage of their own superior mobility, they struck them in their most vulnerable parts. The fighting reached the peak of intensity, both our and enemy tanks were ablaze. But our tankmen preferred to shoot to the last and perish with their machines rather than abandon them and deprive themselves of their weapons before destroying the enemy. In modern operations the issue is decided not only by the breach of the enemy's defence but also by the speed with which this is done, so as to leave the defence no time to re-group its forces and continue the struggle in the depth of its lines. In these battles our tankmen sustained losses, but they imposed their will upon the enemy and checked the rate of his advance, which was in itself a victory.

Suffering heavily from the fire of our tanks and artillery, the Germans abandoned the tactics of massed tank attacks and began to send out twenty to thirty machines at a time; if these succeeded in forcing their way through, the rest of the armada followed. The infantry then advanced behind the tanks, leaving the attacking guns in their defence lines and meeting our counter-attacks with artillery fire from masked guns. This reduced the tempo of the Germans' advance, but it also jeopardized our counter-attacks. The bulk of our

tanks passed to the defensive; they were buried in the ground so deeply that their turrets were barely visible and their guns just peeped above the grass. They were thus converted into hundreds of armoured pill-boxes, steel bulwarks of defence, upon which our infantry and artillery relied, thus forming an impassable barrier.

Against this barrier the German tanks beat in waves hour after hour and day after day; and over each wave aircraft hovered like flocks of sea-gulls. The surrounding country presented the appearance of the landscape on the moon. But our defence remained as firm as a rock. Fighting by the side of our tanks were our tank-destroyer divisions and the motorized infantry which accompanied the tank concentrations. It was here that gunner Panov of the X Tank Unit gained fame as the "tiger killer" by laying out eleven "Tigers" off his own bat. Here the men of the motorized infantry inscribed on their penants, on bits of board, or on tree trunks the oath: "I shall hold this line or die!" They fought in the conviction that they would be supported, that the Germans would not be allowed to outflank and cut them off from their rear and their fuel bases, for the staunchness they displayed was common to all our men.

In these battles our men were led by tank commanders, who had become steeled and hardened in battle and had made a practical study of the enemy's tactics. They were men of different ages, different characters and different degrees of education, but they were bound by the common training they had received in the stern school of war. At the beginning of the war they retired fighting, gulping down their grief. They had fought at Stalingrad, and having learned the lessons of defeat and victory, they took command of cadres of tankmen as steeled and hardened as themselves and led them into battle. The enemy had broken his horns in an endeavour to break through our defence and was now stampeding westwards, to the hills, in the effort to reach Fatezh; but there, too, he met tankmen of the same calibre. Many awaited the outcome of the battle with anxiety. The German offensive was reaching its climax. Its intensity increased. The enemy threw another 300 tanks into the fray.

The unit commanded by Yermachek received the full impact of this onslaught, while two other units launched frontal attacks at the Germans. The German attack was repulsed, but it was resumed again and again for three days running. Finally, the Germans launched a night attack with the object of capturing the hills and entrenching themselves on them under cover of darkness. But that night the tank commander led his men in a counter-attack. After the battle, as the night was dispelled by the rising July sun, the smouldering remains of German tanks were revealed to one's gaze.

At last the climax was reached. It was marked not only by the unprecedented ferocity of the enemy's onslaught, but also by the un-

precedented losses he sustained. Stunned by the unexpected resistance put up by our forces, the German soldiers waited for reinforcements to arrive in order to be driven into the inferno again. But instead of that, the order came to pass to the defensive. They realized then that the Kursk offensive had failed. As Stalin said: "This explodes the legend that in summer the Germans are always successful in an offensive, while the Soviet troops must be in retreat."

The Soviet troops on the Orel-Kursk front launched a counter-offensive and began to push the Germans back to their starting positions. In the course of a few days our troops pierced the German defence north and east of Orel. The battered and enfeebled German divisions were rushed there in an attempt to save the situation. The Hitler High Command, which had dreamed of imposing its will on us and of cutting off the Kursk salient, was robbed of the initiative. It failed to break our defence. We have broken the German defence and are attacking on a wide front, fighting in the tactical depths of the enemy's lines.

The theory and practice of the art of war has been further enriched by the experience of the great July battle. In previous fighting against great odds, when the enemy had succeeded in breaking the tactical depths of our defence, had penetrated to our rear and was threatening the strategical points of our country, the Red Army checked the enemy's onrush, wore him down, passed to the offensive and struck him crushing blows at Moscow and Stalingrad. This year the enemy failed to penetrate the tactical depths of our lines; he was checked and bled white on the first kilometres of our defence; and then our Supreme Command ordered the Red Army to pass to the offensive.

This ability to make the utmost use of defence tactics and to combine defence with attack is the matchless feature of Stalin's invincible strategy, the ideas of which inspire the skill our generals display in the field.

*July 30, 1943*

VASSILY GROSSMAN

## **July 1943**

The third July of the war. The beginning of the month. As in previous years at this time, the German fascist troops again launched an offensive against the Red Army.

And again the dust of war rose over the fields of ripening corn, the broad meadows whose modest beauty outshines all the nurseries and luxuriant hothouses in the country, over the red burdock and cow-wheat, the yellow snapdragon, hart's clover and the bright pinks,

over the lime trees sweetly blossoming on the outskirts of the villages, over the rivulets and the ponds overgrown with green slime and reeds, over the red brick cottages of the Orel villages and the whitewashed adobe huts of the Kursk and Belgorod countryside.

The song of the birds, the rasping sound of the grasshoppers, the buzzing of the gadflies and the droning of the hornets are drowned by the penetrating, nerve-racking and multi-voiced roar of aircraft engines. The moon and stars have vanished from the night sky; they have been extinguished and eclipsed by the arrogant glare of innumerable rockets and flares which the Germans send up along the line of the front.

For about three hundred hours a fierce battle raged in the Orel-Kursk and Belgorod-Kursk directions; a battle into which the Germans had hurled nearly forty divisions, scores of regiments of bomber and fighter planes, and vast masses of artillery.

Everything seemed to promise success. The area of operations was exceptionally limited. The stretch on which they had concentrated seventeen tank divisions could be covered in an automobile in a matter of forty or fifty minutes. Since the end of March columns of motor transports had been flowing in an unending stream to the point where, into the trap which they had prepared for our troops, they intended to hurl tens of thousands of tons of shells. By the date of the opening of the offensive they had accumulated from five to eight sets of ammunition equipment for every division, amounting, in the aggregate, to a weight of metal which even a geologist could not afford to ignore.

I had the opportunity of visiting the forces which met the impact of the enemy's main drive: a rifle regiment under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Shevernozhuk, which met the impact of the German armada near a railway station between Orel and Kursk—Ponyri, famous in peace time for its apples. In the Belgorod direction I also visited a tank-destroyer artillery regiment, which formed part of the brigade under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Chevola. Both these officers, who were probably unaware of each other's existence, encountered on the same day and at the same hour the German tanks and self-propelled artillery rushing headlong from the North and South with the object of meeting in Kursk. This is exactly what the German soldiers were told before the offensive was launched: "You will now receive five days' rations. The next issues you will receive in Kursk."

Lieutenant Colonel Yevtikhy Shevernozhuk is a burly man of enormous stature, slow and deliberate in his movements and slow and deliberate in speech. He walks slowly, smiles slowly, and frowns slowly. But sometimes his enormous body moves with amazing ease and swiftness, and his voice rings out sharp, commanding and stern. In the course of five days the division to which his regiment belongs withstood thirty-two enemy tank attacks made by eight hundred German tanks accom-

panied by infantry: the "Fire and Sword" Storm Division. In these attacks the Germans lost 10,700 men and 221 tanks.

The regiment had been withdrawn for rest five kilometres from the railway station where it had been engaged in continuous fighting for one hundred and twenty-five hours. We were lying in a hollow, listening to the roar of our guns and the detonation of the German shells. Drops of rain, which had just fallen in torrents, glistened on the broad burdock leaves, the flowers of which were turned towards the sun which had just emerged from the clouds. Whenever there was a particularly loud explosion the leaves trembled and thousands of raindrops glittered in the sun. Scores of men were sleeping on the wet grass, covered with their greatcoats. Rain water had accumulated in the folds of the cloth, but the men slept on. They were wrapped in deep and heavy slumber, deaf to the roar of battle, to the rumbling of the passing summer storm, to the glare of the scorching sun, to the wind, and to the clang and rattle of tractor treads. This five days' battle, this superhuman strain on the nerves and on all the spiritual and physical strength man is capable of exerting, had exhausted them. I think that nowhere in the world were there at that time men who had so honestly deserved their rest as these Red Army men sleeping in the rain puddles. To them this hollow, where the earth and vegetation trembled with the shock of gunfire and bursting shells, seemed as far in the rear as Sverdlovsk or Alma-Ata. To them the sky, bespattered with sparks and the white puffs of bursting anti-aircraft shells, in which twenty-six German planes were wheeling with a whine for a dive on the railway station, was a peaceful summer sky. Here they were, lying on the wet grass among the flowers and soft, woolly burdock leaves sprinkled with heavy, sparkling raindrops. The regimental commander, Lieutenant Colonel Shevernozhuk, and his second in command, Lieutenant Colonel Barger and I were lying on the slope of the hollow. The officers were relating to me their experiences in the battles they had just fought, but speaking in a low voice as if fearing to disturb the sleeping men.

This regiment is virtually a reproduction in miniature of the multi-national population of our country. The majority of the men are Russian workers and peasants, inhabitants of the Kursk, Orel and Moscow Regions; but there are also many Uzbeks, Kazakhs and Tatars in the regiment. All are united by strong ties of friendship, of common labour, and the vital fraternity of the war; and all fought in these battles like a single, indestructible and mighty entity. Not one of them during these frightful, bloody trials betrayed even a shadow of consternation or fear. Side by side are inscribed the names of the Russian Purgin, the Tatar Abdukhairov, the Ukrainian Andrewshenko, the Russian Stukachev and of the Kazakh Sati Baldeyev, who is famous in the regiment for having single-handed, armed with a light machine gun, fought a hundred fascists, emerging victorious from this unequal battle.



This friendship and solidarity became still more strongly cemented in the course of the fighting.

The men had gained a great deal from the hard training they had undergone in the period when things were quiet on this front, particularly the oft-repeated exercises when tanks rolled over the trenches in which they were standing. Many of them have been on active service since the beginning of the war and have become skilled "craftsmen" and "foremen" of the "smelting shops" and "forges" of this war. The men displayed their coolness in battle in a variety of ways, of which the following slight incident, related to me by the regimental commander, may serve as an illustration. During a brief lull in the battle the orderlies were bringing the men their dinner along the communication trench. Just at that moment the enemy opened heavy fire with his field and trench-mortar batteries. Lieutenant Colonel Shevernozhuk saw his men interrupt their meal and sit calmly in their trenches among the black tornado of earth and whizzing shrapnel, covering their billycans with the palms of their hands to prevent the flying earth from dropping into their soup.

"How did the commanders of the infantry battalions behave when meeting the enemy's main drive?" I asked.

"Oh, our commanders are as hard as nails now," answered Lieutenant Colonel Shevernozhuk, smiling. "They do not lose control of their men no matter what the circumstances may be. In these battles—and the regiment had never seen such intense fighting before—in spite of the fire and smoke, the fierce bombing from the air and the unremittent tank attacks, my communication with the battalions, and the radio communication between the battalions, were never interrupted once. And the telephone communication maintained by the signallers within the battalions themselves was as perfect as the nerve fibres embedded in the flesh of your body. You could not tear it out."

Battalion commanders, Captain Zozulin, who encountered the enemy's main drive at Ponyri, and Major Chayalov, have been on active service since the beginning of the war, and Captain Likhoded, the third battalion commander, has been at the front for over a year. All three are bound by ties of personal friendship, by a feeling of comradeship which has been cemented by many long months of joint war service. Both the regimental and the divisional commander took pains to encourage this personal friendship among the battalion commanders, for they realized that in the course of action it was as effective a force as well-established communications and the proper disposition of field and anti-tank artillery.

"In these battles," the regimental commander continued, "the battalion commanders proved that they were fully mature officers. Not once did any of them ask for assistance from Headquarters, and

I must say frankly that had we gone through anything like this two years ago I would have received a dozen requests for aid in the first fifteen minutes. Now they say: We can cope with the situation ourselves, but please see that so-and-so is provided. And they think of each other as much as they do of themselves."

"And you must say something about their matchless courage," intervened Lieutenant Colonel Barger. "Now, the watchword: 'Stand fast unto death!' is no longer a mere watchword for the commanders, but an obligatory rule of conduct in battle. We no longer have men with civilian habits in the army."

A few minutes after the above conversation took place we witnessed the following episode. Emerging from the hollow we encountered a squad of Red Armymen, among whom there were several swarthy Uzbeks and some high cheek-boned Kazakhs, the rest were Russians. Suddenly, out of a nearby copse, about a dozen German dive bombers appeared, accompanied by a number of Messers. In an instant the air was rent by the sound of bursting shells, the rattle of heavy machine guns and the rapid barking of anti-aircraft guns. The commander of the squad shouted: "Fire!"

Watching the actions, the expressions on the faces and the motions of these Red Armymen I suddenly found the clue to the secret of our successes, and realized why the mailed fist which Hitler had raised in the Orel-Kursk direction had dropped impotently, failing to break down our defence. Caught by this swift and vicious air raid, this handful of men, who were probably going to the field kitchen to get their supper, took up their positions with magnificent coolness, deliberation and precision, like highly-skilled craftsmen in the art of war, and within two or three seconds they opened fire on the raiders with their automatics, rifles and machine guns.

Not a trace of confusion. They could not have chosen better positions for firing if they had searched for them for half an hour. They fired at their targets with the calm concentration that a skilled craftsman displays in performing an intricate, difficult, but familiar task, and in the same concentrated way. A moment later the enemy planes, encountering this dense fire, shot skywards and fled to the North. The Red Armymen stopped firing and after examining their weapons in a business-like manner, lined up and proceeded on their way, their billy-cans rattling by their sides. During the whole period of the raid only one word was uttered, the command: "Fire!" That is how our Red Armymen met a sudden raid of enemy fighter planes in the summer of 1943.

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Lieutenant Colonel Nikifor Chevola, who before the war had worked in the Grozny oilfields, and now commanded a brigade of anti-tank

artillery, encountered the Germans as they were rushing North along the Belgorod-Kursk Highway in the direction of Kursk. This was exactly the time when the rifle regiment commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Shevernozhuk was beating off the tank attacks of the Germans who were driving towards Kursk from the North. Three times the Lieutenant Colonel's brigade of tank-destroyer artillery barred the road to the German tank columns, participating in gigantic battles in intricate combination with our infantry, tanks, artillery and aircraft, in those great battles which raged in three dimensions, in which periods of intensity alternated with periods of lull with lightning rapidity, battles replete with death, enemy craft and cunning, secret designs, feints, sudden periods of awful silence and equally sudden short but terrific blows. Three times the enemy tried to outflank Chevola's brigade, and three times the commander, seeing through the enemy's designs, countered them by releasing a sudden tornado of shot and shell. The first time he struck the enemy tank column a heavy frontal blow. The second time the brigade took cover about 600 metres from the road leading to the Oboyan Highroad and allowing nine "Tigers," which were protecting the enemy tank column, to pass, it struck with all its batteries at the flank of the column consisting of one hundred and sixty tanks interspersed with armoured troop carriers, now stretching and now contracting like a huge, scaly snake in motion. Within five minutes these magnificently modernized guns set fire to fourteen of the enemy tanks. The huge, scaly snake crept from the road amidst a cloud of smoke and dust and, turning to the right, vanished behind a hill.

Guessing what this move meant, the tank-destroyer brigade, after sending out a scouting party, dashed across country and for the third time barred the way for the fascist tanks.

At night its batteries took up their positions on the flanks of a deserted village. None of the men slept that night. The whitewashed walls of the peasants' huts gleamed in the moonlight. Two hours after the guns had been placed in position a German tank reconnoitring party entered the village. Everybody, from the brigade commander to the shell carrier, realized that fighting would commence at dawn.

That battle lasted three days and three nights. Thirty to forty enemy bombers dived over the gun positions, over the infantry trenches, and over the tanks, which were operating in conjunction with the destroyer brigade. No sooner did the bombers depart than the enemy tanks appeared and rushed to the attack in groups of 40, 80 and 140. They rushed forward like an avalanche, without maintaining any particular order and, like an avalanche, they poured back, leaving many of their number in the field like heaps of burning steel corpses. During the first day of the battle gunlayer Novikov damaged seven enemy tanks, including three "Tigers." Novikov worked his gun coolly and without haste; he would calmly take aim, fire, smile, wipe the black sweat from his

brow, and take aim again. At every hit the infantry would raise a cheer and throw their caps and steel helmets in the air. But no sooner did the tanks scamper off than Junkers and Messers appeared, dived, riddled the ground with machine-gun bullets and ploughed it up with bombs. After this the tanks returned, sheltering with their steel armour battalions of German automatic-riflemen. But our infantry drove them off with machine-gun and automatic-rifle fire. The air was thick with smoke; the men were as black as chimney sweeps. All were hoarse from shouting, for only by shouting at the top of their voices could they make themselves heard above the roar of the guns and the clang of steel. They took snatches of food whenever the opportunity offered, the white pieces of pork turning black from smoke and dust before they entered their mouths.

Lieutenant Colonel Chevola maintained communication with Headquarters by radio. His batteries were half-surrounded. He now fully realized what the Germans were aiming at. Their object was to break through the barrier and "strike at the root" of our big infantry concentration. This placed thousands of men in jeopardy, and threatened our defence on a wide stretch of the front.

The General in command of the infantry concentration in question told Lieutenant Colonel Chevola over the radio: "I cannot send you any assistance for another few hours; you have my permission to retreat." But the Lieutenant Colonel adopted a decision which, in my opinion, was a striking testimony of the high military-ethical standard our commanders have cultivated in the course of the war, and which was such an extremely important factor in determining our success in the July battles. The senior officer, whose flank Chevola's brigade was covering, granted the brigade commander permission to retreat, but the latter fully realized what the consequences of such a move would be. He replied: "We shall not retreat. We shall stand fast and die if need be."

At dawn, the German tanks attacked. Simultaneously, German aircraft appeared and set fire to the village. Under cover of the smoke and flames the tanks advanced, but our artillerymen stood fast.

Battery commander Ketselman fell wounded, dying in a pool of blood. The first gun was demolished by a direct hit, another shell severed the arm and head of the range-finder, Sergeant Smirnov. Lance-Sergeant Melekhin, the commander of the gun crew, a jolly fellow, brisk in his movements and expert in the art of destroying tanks in which a fraction of a second decides the issue of a duel, lay stunned, his dark, misty eyes staring at the gun, which also looked like a wounded soldier, with strips of rubber tyre ripped by shell splinters hanging from its wheels. Gunlayer Teslenko and Kalabin, the man at the breach; were slightly wounded, but remained in action. The only one unhurt



Soviet tanks going into action



Soviet tankists passing a demolished „Ferdinand“



Soviet tanks concentrating on the forward line

was the shell carrier Davidov. But the Germans were drawing closer, "almost clutching at the gun barrels," as the artillerymen say.

Mikhail Vassilyev, the commander of the neighbouring gun, formerly a Kronstadt sailor, took command of the battery. "Lads!"—he said, "We may die, but the cause is worth the sacrifice. Bigger men than we are dying," and forthwith ordered the men to load the guns with shrapnel and turn them on the German infantry. When the shrapnel ran out he ordered the men to fire point-blank with armour-piercing shells.

And so this battle raged until fresh destroyer units, infantry and tanks arrived. When the brigade was withdrawn and sent to the rear to rest the General in command of the infantry concentration came out to meet it, and standing in the dusty road he thanked the victors.

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The Germans failed to pass in the Belgorod-Kursk direction. They failed to pass in the Kursk-Orel direction. The most concentrated summer offensive the Germans ever launched was frustrated. Before this offensive the common opinion was that in the present war, whenever the Germans concentrate a strong force and launch a drive in field and steppe country with plenty of good roads, they are bound to gain territory in the first stage. It seemed as though this was a law not only of strategy, but also of physics and mechanics. But the Red Army upset this law. The Germans did not pass.

Among the fields of ripening corn, across the broad sweet-smelling meadows, amidst the grey and yellow dust, under the threatening storm clouds in the July sky, amidst the rumbling of distant thunder and gusts of hot, stifling wind, our tanks, artillery, motorized infantry; and creaking baggage carts are moving. The radiators of the automobiles, the turrets of the heavy tanks and the muzzles of the guns are decorated with ears of corn and with bunches of pinks, cornflowers and daisies.

The Red Army is advancing.

*July 27, 1943*

KONSTANTIN SIMONOV

## The Second Variant

The last few months had been marked by a constant feeling of tension. In spite of the fact that the front was stabilized, and had been for some time, no one so much as entertained the naive thought that this could continue indefinitely and that the Germans would not try

to take revenge. The brigade had worked out five possible variants for the resumption of active hostilities. In accordance with each variant a strict plan of action was outlined, stipulating the infantry and artillery units with which the brigade would operate, the particular zone on which it would concentrate and the location of its command posts.

As they say in the brigade, all the defence zones were made ready in advance. The men dug trenches and tank shelters beforehand, and all the commanders, down to the tank commanders, reconnoitred the terrain round about. Moreover, an approximate survey was made of the zones, and the firing range was calculated. So that it should be possible to manœuvre given any of the five variants, the brigade was stationed in the near rear. The brigade would have to advance to the line of contact, and its route was also prepared in advance. The lines of march were reconnoitred, as were the hidden approaches to the defence zones; the loads which all the bridges could take and the passability of all fords on the line of march were ascertained; signals and codes were worked out, and a double line of communication was established between the brigade and the units with which it was to operate. Several times unexpected alarms were sounded and the tanks went out to the indicated battle areas for all five variants.

Late at night on July 4 our scouts surprised a party of German sappers who were clearing lanes through the mine-fields on the left flank of the army. In the ensuing skirmish they killed fourteen Germans, two managed to escape and the seventeenth was taken prisoner. The information he gave revealed that everything was ready for an offensive, that tanks and infantry had been drawn up to the forward position and massed there, and that the whole thing was scheduled to begin at 2 a.m. sharp.

The main line of the German drive had not yet been finally ascertained. Fierce fighting was raging at the forward position, and the tankmen, making sure that all was ready for the hundredth time, were waiting for their turn to pitch in. By twelve o'clock noon the situation became clear. Large forces of Germans had penetrated into the position of one of our units, pressing it back, and were advancing along the Orel-Kursk road. Hostilities had developed in accordance with the second variant. At 12.30 the brigade received orders to proceed to the combat zone in the vicinity of the railroad, so that in accordance with the plan it could support the division stationed there and stem the Germans' advance.

The brigade came up just as the German tanks which had broken through the forward zone and outflanked one of our regiments were trying to wipe it out, keeping it from withdrawing to the next zone. The brigade was ordered to the regiment's assistance. At 6 p.m. sharp the brigade launched a counter-attack in full force. Fifteen minutes before this, Colonel Petrushin had called together his commanders



and given them verbal instructions. The tankmen dispersed to their tanks and the brigade set out. The brigade's mobile infantry followed in the wake of the tank battalions.

In front of the brigade stretched a familiar uneven plain, intersected with numerous gullies and knolls overgrown with low underbrush. It was a clear day and the setting sun dazzled the eyes of the tankmen. As soon as the tanks deployed, the Germans opened heavy artillery and mortar fire at them. The tanks continued for two kilometres under this incessant barrage. At the head of the battalions went their commanders: on the right—Loboda, on the left—Salyukov. Petrushin himself and his chief of staff were in their tanks behind the crest of the nearest hill, and having raised the hatches of their turrets were watching the operations.

When they had advanced these two kilometres and reached the chain of low hills beyond which our regiment was fighting in encirclement, the right flank battalion under Major Loboda was attacked from the flank by enemy tanks. Fifteen "T-VI's" ("Tigers") and self-propelled guns of the "Ferdinand" type attacked simultaneously. German infantry followed on the tanks in close formation. In order to repulse the attack, Loboda's battalion swung around to the right, and his tanks, having halted, opened fire on the Germans from behind the knolls.

At first the encounter developed unfavourably for us. The Germans broke through the flank and immediately crippled and then set fire to three of the right-flank tanks. A section of the mobile infantry battalion and heavy self-propelled guns were sent forward to support the right flank. Colonel Petrushin directed these manoeuvres by wireless from his tank. All commands were given in the clear, in accordance with a previously prepared code map.

The engagement lasted for an hour and a half. Upon encountering the intense fire of our tanks the Germans likewise halted, and then began to draw back slowly. In the course of this encounter another of our tanks was damaged, while the Germans lost six tanks in quick succession. It is this that induced them to withdraw. The duel was conducted at a range of 900 to 1,000 metres.

Meanwhile Salyukov's battalion, which was on the left flank, had moved ahead another kilometre, encountering heavy fire from the hills lying ahead of it. The battalion took cover behind the knolls of the uneven terrain and answered the Germans with fierce fire. The enemy tank attacks on the encircled infantry regiment were repelled. The main fire of the German artillery was directed against the brigade as it entered the field. Taking advantage of this, the infantry regiment launched a counter-attack on a detachment of enemy tommy-gunners which had made its way to the rear of the regiment, wiped out the detachment, and withdrew in good order to the rear of the brigade. The

tankmen kept the Germans from pursuing the regiment, and by engaging the enemy till night fell, enabled it to fortify itself in the next zone, which had been prepared beforehand.

Thus the first day resulted in considerable losses for the brigade. Four heavy tanks had been put out of commission, Lieutenant Andrianov, one of the best commanders, perished in his tank, Lieutenant Shumsky, commander of the Command Platoon, was also killed in this battle. But the Germans too did not get off lightly.

It had grown dark. The tanks had taken up positions in previously prepared deep trenches, from which only their turrets showed. Meanwhile the brigade infantry scouts, whose main work, as ever, was at night, made their way to the German lines in three groups, under the command of Captain Stukolov. Long before dawn, reconnaissance established that all night the Germans had been feverishly drawing up tanks to the firing line.

From his dugout Colonel Petrushin gave all the necessary orders for the morning. Everything was in readiness before dawn. Remaining alone, he involuntarily recalled the hurried way in which both he and the other commanders had done everything at the beginning of the war, and how they had always been short of time. Now, on the contrary, even in the midst of heavy fighting, thanks to their experience, inurement and the organizational skill they had finally acquired, he even had half an hour to spare.

The Colonel had not had an easy time of it in the war. At first he had experienced all the bitterness of retreat. He had retreated together with others, putting up a stiff fight, and in the woods around the Dnieper had set fire with his own hands to tanks that had become stranded for lack of fuel, for they could not be left to the Germans. He had experienced terrible bereavement in the course of the war. On June 25, 1941, at the Sarny railway station, German planes had swooped down on a train evacuating women and children, and had brought him irreparable sorrow: his wife lost an arm and a leg, torn off by fragments of a German bomb, and his five-year-old son, who had been with her, had disappeared and could not be found. The Colonel's brother, a village teacher who had become an officer during the war, had been reported missing. His sister-in-law had been hanged by the Germans. He had not heard from his mother for a year and a half, ever since the front had moved eastward and she had remained behind the German lines. No matter how accustomed he became to the feeling of solitude and the ruin of his home and family, whenever he recalled all this his heart involuntarily contracted and if at such moments he thought of the Germans he would be filled with the cold calm of a man who hates boundlessly, without invective, without agitation, without hysterics, and this because he hated with a hate that was strong and terrible beyond the ordinary.

In the morning, after massed artillery and air preparation, the Germans pushed ahead. Petrushin's brigade encountered them with fire. The brigade's previously prepared advantageously situated positions made for success. From their shelters our tanks kept up a steady fire on the advancing Germans. In addition, the Germans had incorrectly gauged the positions of the brigade, and instead of taking it in the flank had themselves come under the brigade's flank fire. With a few short intervals the battle lasted about ten hours. During this time our tankmen succeeded in setting fire to eight "Tigers" which had gone ahead, and three heavy anti-tank guns. At the end of the day the Germans withdrew, having achieved nothing.

The next day was unusually bright. At seven o'clock the sun was already blazing in the sky. And at seven sharp the Germans opened a furious bombardment against our infantry and tanks. The shells exploded in a solid wall. This artillery fire damaged two tanks, which had to be hauled away for repairs. Following on the barrage, forty German tanks and two regiments of infantry advanced on the railway station, which was on the left. They tried to make their way through an advantageous hollow between the railway bed and the gully behind which the left flank of the brigade was stationed. The first column of Germans to go this way consisted of twenty-two "Tigers." Simultaneously, in order to distract the attention of the tankmen from the direction of the main blow, another fifteen German tanks moved on the right flank of the brigade. Petrushin ordered his battalions to open fire on the enemy tanks and to keep them from breaking through to the South, then, at the first opportunity, to launch a counter-attack with part of their forces against the German infantry following on the tanks.

When the "Tigers" came within direct range, heavy fire was opened on them again. Part of the "Tigers" were set ablaze and wrecked on the spot; part reversed gear and began to back out. Only three or four broke through our infantry's lines and came out at the southern end of the station. At this moment, on the Colonel's order, Lieutenant Baklagov's company counter-attacked and punched out at the German infantry, which was also trying to push through to the station. This blow took the Germans completely by surprise. Our tank cannon and machine guns inflicted heavy losses on them and pinned those who survived to the ground, after which, one by one, they began to crawl back to the rear under the machine-gun fire. When the German tanks that had broken through saw that the infantry was not behind them, they were obliged to withdraw.

This time the battle lasted from seven in the morning till three in the afternoon. Two of our tanks were destroyed by fire, while the Germans lost eight tanks. At three o'clock an unexpected lull set in, but at eight sharp, after a heavy artillery bombardment, sixteen German tanks accompanied by infantry made a thrust right at the position

of the brigade. The leading German tanks laid down a smoke screen. As ill luck would have it the wind was blowing our way. Under cover of this screen the Germans pierced the junction between the battalions, half encircling the left battalion, under Salyukov.

\*At this critical juncture Colonel Petrushin threw the brigade reserves onto the left flank: heavy self-propelled cannon against the tanks, and a mobile infantry unit against the oncoming infantry. The resolute support given by all branches of the reserves gained the day. The tanks and artillery pounded the attacking German tanks furiously, while the mobile infantry launched a counter-attack against the German infantry. Several times the fighting developed into a hand-to-hand encounter. Hand grenades were flying when it was already dark and explosions flared up all over the field, now here, now there. By midnight the Germans were thrown back.

Another day of tense battles followed, and again, after launching a series of attacks, the enemy was thrown back. At night the movement of tanks could be heard once more behind the German lines. It was evident that the Germans were drawing up some new unit for the purpose of launching a decisive general attack the next day.

That is what actually happened. At 9 a.m. the Germans did indeed launch a vehement offensive. They directed their medium tanks against the right flank battalion, while their main blow aimed at outflanking the left flank battalion, thereby making it impossible for the forces of the brigade there to manoeuvre. Their "Tigers" sustained serious losses, but nevertheless they outflanked the left flank battalion, and from its rear began to push through the position of the mobile infantry. Following on the tanks, much closer than usual, came the German infantry. The situation had become critical. The outcome of the battle depended on whether the mobile battalion in the trenches would hold out, allowing the tanks to pass over it, or whether it would fail to do so and begin to withdraw.

But it was not for nothing that the mobile infantry had been "steam-rollered" by their own tanks all spring, thereby becoming convinced in practice that if you dig yourself into the ground well enough a tank holds no terrors for you. On training days, after our tanks had rumbled and thundered over the heads of the infantry for the dozenth time, halting over the trenches and turning round on them, the men were convinced that it was possible to hold out and that they could put up a fight. And when now the enemy tanks passed over the mobile infantry, the men fought to the last. They set fire to seven "Tigers." It seemed that a well-aimed anti-tank grenade would blow up the caterpillars of even a "Tiger," while a well-aimed incendiary bottle sent them up in flames no less than other tanks.

But not leaving the trenches when German tanks were roaring overhead was only half the work done. This time the German infantry was

following right on the heels of the tanks, and our men had to plunge into a hand-to-hand encounter with the Germans almost immediately after the last tank had passed. A long-drawn-out skirmish with grenades ensued in the trenches. With the enemy tanks at their rear, the mobile infantry repulsed the attacks of the Germans from the front.

Meanwhile the German tanks were penetrating more and more deeply. Thereupon, by order of the Colonel, the left flank battalion, which the Germans had outflanked, effected a swift and bold manoeuvre. Leaving its former positions with lightning speed it moved to the right and back, encountering the German tanks head-on in the rear of their own positions. We sustained losses in this encounter, but the Germans, who had not expected this blow in the depths of the defences, suffered even greater casualties. They began to withdraw.

However, the German infantry, part of which had been held up by our mobile infantry, succeeded in infiltrating to the left, far beyond the infantry and almost up to brigade Headquarters. Sizing up the situation, the brigade commander sent up four trucks with quadrupled braces of AA machine guns mounted on them. These trucks appeared unexpectedly on the open field through which the Germans who had broken through were advancing, and opened up a withering fire on them. With their very first bursts they wiped out as many as two hundred Germans who had not managed to fall flat. The rest beat a hasty retreat. At 6 p.m. this final German attack was completely repulsed in all directions.

Night set in. The last day had been particularly trying. Lieutenant Kostyrin, one of the finest of the tank company commanders, and many others were no longer among the living. But although on the previous night the men had been reeling with exhaustion, now, to all appearances, they had drawn their second breath, or perhaps the nervous strain had reached such a pitch that it was impossible for them to fall asleep.

That night, when hostilities ceased, everyone felt the as yet unexpressed thought that gradually became more and more distinct: the Germans had been halted. There was no doubt about it. Here, on this sector, where the brigade had determined to make a stand at any cost, it had indeed held out and stemmed the Germans. Aside from the fact that it had inflicted four times as heavy losses on the enemy tanks as it had sustained itself, the brigade had accomplished another and even more important thing. The Germans, who had formerly advanced from forty to sixty kilometres in the days of their breakthroughs, who had been exhausted only at the end of a month, had now been bled white and rendered helpless in the course of a few days. On the first day they had made a little headway, pressing back our lines, but subsequently, in spite of all their efforts and losses, they had not advanced an inch. And this was undoubtedly a great victory.

Colonel Petrushin's Tank Brigade, fighting shoulder to shoulder with other units, held out against the frenzied pressure of the assaulting Germans. And this did not remain without consequences. A short time passed and the Germans on this sector of the front were thrown back to the initial positions from which they had begun their July 5 offensive. The patch of Soviet territory on which the brigade fought, this patch of territory strewn with the remains of charred "Tigers" and lavishly drenched with German blood, has again become ours.

*July 22, 1943*

KONSTANTIN SIMONOV

### **The German From the "Ferdinand"**

In front of me sat a German soldier, a private, an ordinary German, who, I should say, was all the more interesting for the very reason that he was so ordinary. Like hundreds and thousands of others he is a product of the winter "total mobilization." He was drafted in the winter and saw action for the first time three days ago, here, in the Orel-Kursk direction.

He is a thin, lanky German, with nothing remarkable in his appearance, sloping shoulders and drowsy eyes in which terror is frozen fast. When I began to talk to him it suddenly became clear that the terror frozen in his eyes is not at all the terror that used to lurk in the eyes of the German war prisoners, say, a year or two ago. At that time they were afraid that they would be killed when they were captured. Today he, like many others, no longer believes this. His eyes hold terror because in general he has been drawn into the war. This terror appeared on the day when the "total mobilization" reached him. The nearer he got to the front the more this terror turned into sheer horror. And even though he has been prisoner for two days already this total terror still does not leave him.

His name is Adolf Meyer and he was nineteen in April. He comes from the village of Eistrub in Hannover. He was called up in the winter. He served with the self-propelled artillery in Rouen, France. At that time he was eighteen, but there were seventy men in his company even younger than he. Besides there were no few old men, while 110 were veteran soldiers.

He tells how well they lived in Rouen. They experienced their first twinge of alarm in April, when the new self-propelled cannon of the "Ferdinand" make, which had just been introduced, came to their unit. They realized that with such cannon they would not be sitting in Rouen for long. In other words, it meant that they would soon be sent

to the front. Their alarm grew when the commander of their battery, a certain Captain Köning, began to talk to them with unusual insistence about the strength of these cannon, assuring them that their armour could not be pierced. "Two hundred millimetre armour-plating in front, and eighty millimetre on the sides is something that has never yet been seen," he said. "The enemy's shells cannot pierce either the 'Tigers' accompanying us, or still less our 'Ferdinands,' whose frontal armour-plating is even thicker than that of the 'Tigers.'"

In May the Captain held forth at particularly great length about this, and in June they were sent to the Eastern Front.

"Why did they tell you that the armour of your 'Ferdinands' was impenetrable?"

"So that we shouldn't be afraid of pushing ahead."

"But the armour of your 'Ferdinand' was pierced, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"So then Captain Köning lied to you?"

"Yes."

Adolf Meyer tells about the two days of fighting in which he took part. He never went as far as the third day because he was taken prisoner. Perhaps it was even worse for him that he believed in the invulnerability of the "Ferdinand" of which he was the driver. When he saw two "Tigers" ahead of him going up in flames and then when the "Ferdinand" beside him began to smoke, he was utterly at a loss—he was not prepared for this. Back there in Rouen, he was happy in the belief that he was going to drive a "Ferdinand" without any danger to himself. Now he had to unburden himself of this illusion quickly—a shell had hit the caterpillar.

The "Ferdinand" had been halted and he realized that if he remained standing there, everything would soon be up with him. Thereupon, without even talking it over, the whole crew climbed out of the "Ferdinand" as one man and began to crawl back under the steady artillery bombardment. After they had crawled off some distance, he saw that there were only two of them, he and the gunner, Karl Siege, the others had disappeared. The next day Siege also disappeared in some unknown direction, and he, Meyer, was given another "Ferdinand" to drive, the former driver having been killed the day before.

When he climbed into the driver's seat he noticed a little hole made by a shell in the right side of the armour a bit above his head, the hole through which the driver whom he had replaced had been killed. Driving into action he involuntarily kept glancing at this hole; he no longer attached a pfennig's worth of importance to Captain Köning's assurances, or, to be more exact, forgot them completely. He was terribly afraid that he would be killed, afraid that the Russians would make another hole beside the one already over his head, and that would mean the end for him.

Fortunately for him, when a shell hit, it landed in the rear of the gun, and the driver, who was sitting in front, was the sole survivor. Climbing out of the burning "Ferdinand," he crouched down in a nearby shell hole. It was impossible to get away, as shells were bursting all around.

In the evening the Russians launched a counter-attack and took him prisoner. And there he sat in front of me, disillusioned with his "Ferdinand" and utterly stupefied with fear. He was only fifteen when the war began. He grew to adolescence during the war. There are hundreds of thousands, possibly a million, like him in the German army today. That is why his psychology is of particular interest. His father is a basket weaver and he has two brothers who go to school, ten and twelve years of age.

"I suppose your brothers are no longer in danger of entering the war?"

"I also hoped I wouldn't be roped in," he says shrugging his shoulders, and this movement is expressive of the hopeless feeling that the war may continue to the end of time.

"In school my friends and I were most afraid of reaching draft age before the war ended."

"When were you afraid of this?"

"Last year and the year before, when the war with Russia began."

"And before the war with Russia, when your troops had just entered Paris, were you also afraid of getting into the war?"

"No, what we were afraid of then was that it would be all over before we managed to get into it. In general our spirits were a hundred per cent higher then."

These words express the entire psychology of the two-legged beasts that Hitler is not unsuccessfully trying to make out of the young Germans. The war was a mere pleasure jaunt, and they were afraid of not getting into it. Now the war has become a thing of horror, and they, on the contrary, are afraid of getting into it.

Did he believe that Germany would win? No, not now, when he was prisoner. But how about before then? Yes, at first he was absolutely convinced of this. But how about later? Later, they retreated at Moscow and retreated at Stalingrad, and he began to have misgivings as to the final outcome and at best to fear that the whole business would drag on for a long time. At last he landed at the front in his invulnerable "Ferdinand" and saw how many tanks and how much armament of all kinds there were around him. Once again, to speak frankly, he thought that everything would go quickly and smoothly—after all there were a terrific number of tanks and all the rest of it. When was it, then, that he was convinced of the contrary? When shells wrecked first one and then another "Ferdinand." Before then he knew nothing about Russia, read only the official war communiques in the newspapers. Did he ever give any thought to the newspapers? No, he



did not, he simply read them and threw them aside. And when Paulus's army surrendered, did he know about it? He did, but then the Italians were to blame for that. Why the Italians? Because they ran away, opened the front and therefore Paulus was surrounded.

"And in Tunis, were the Italians to blame as well?"

"Yes, that was what we were told. They should have defended their Tunis themselves. Our army perished there because we had to help the Italians."

Frank enmity towards his allies is reflected on his face. Somehow it is easier and pleasanter to believe that all these setbacks occurred because of those cursed Italians.

"And what do you think, how much have you retreated in Russia this winter?"

"I think," he says knitting his brows at this unusual problem, "I think, about two hundred kilometres."

"And weren't you told that it wasn't two hundred, but six hundred and seven hundred?"

"No, we weren't told that."

Formerly the newspapers always used to publish maps, but later they stopped doing so altogether.

"And what do you think, at present, on the 5th of July, were you Germans launching an offensive or retreating?"

"We were on the offensive, of course." He raised his eyebrows in astonishment.

"And were you given orders to launch an offensive?"

"Yes, on the evening of July 4, Captain Köning lined us up and read us Hitler's order about going over to a general offensive against the Russians."

"Didn't you think he was reading some trumped-up order?"

"No, we actually did start the offensive in the morning."

"And yet the German Information Bureau is reporting that all these days not you but we, the Russians, were on the offensive."

This he did not know.

"What do you think is the reason for such a communique, which is patently false?"

"Most likely," he replied after some thought, "they saw it wasn't a big success and didn't want to upset our people in Germany."

It seems that to understand the clumsy concoction of the German Information Agency even he has sufficient imagination. Suddenly, without waiting to be asked, he began to relate rapidly that back home in his village forty of his acquaintances had already been killed while a hundred had been wounded and when he was home on leave his family only dreamed that he would not land at the front. . . . And in general many have been killed. If only the whole thing would end soon!

There he sat in front of me, this product of "total mobilization," one of those who taken together constitute Hitler's last decisive card in this war. The self-propelled "Ferdinand," like the tank of the "Tiger" type, is a good and powerful weapon. It is the last word in military technique, and determination coupled with great skill is needed in order to render it harmless. It is true not every shell will pierce its 200 mm. frontal armour-plating, nor will it do so at any angle. But hundreds of "Ferdinands," as well as "Tigers," are already blazing now on the Orel and Kursk fields. Incidentally, that is only half of our success. The other half is the psychological temper of Adolf Meyer and thousands like him who have not yet been taken prisoner and are still fighting. Their "Ferdinands" are flaring up and flying to bits. They were told lies, trust being placed in the staunchness of the armour and none whatever in the staunchness of their morale.

This is a good sign. We never tell our Soviet tankmen that our tanks are invulnerable and cannot be pierced. When they go into action they always know that although their tanks are strong there is no armour against which a shell cannot be found. They know this, know that they may die, and yet they courageously go into action. In order to make such as Adolf Meyer take a gun into action it is necessary to deceive them, to convince them of invulnerability, to overcome their fear of death. In this lies the tremendous difference between their men and ours, in this lies one of the guarantees of our victory.

The Hitlerite chiefs lied to their soldiers, assuring them that they would secure victory easily and without much trouble; they lied to the families of the men, telling them that enemy aircraft would never appear over the cities of Germany. Now they are tasting the fruit of their lies—animal fear on the part of the cowardly beasts that began the war in the belief that they would go scot-free, now disillusioned and trembling in terror. The Germans are now receiving mountains of letters in whose lines and between whose lines this same persistent total fear peeps that is now fixed for a long time to come in the eyes of war prisoner Adolf Meyer.

It is a good thing that these letters are written in such a way that they breathe fear. But we have no pity. It is a good thing that they are afraid, good that they are terrified. Only death and fear can touch them. Only steel can convince them. Guns are thundering. Today the Germans are launching an offensive again. They are still strong, striving to push ahead, but beside the desire to kill, beside their greedy appetites for plunder, they are more than ever filled with fear as well, and this is good.

*July 14, 1943*

## The "Panther" Hunter

Yesterday I had occasion to talk to Adolf Meyer, a German prisoner of war, driver of the German summer novelty, the heavy self-propelled cannon called the "Ferdinand." And today, right now, I am talking to Alexei Yerokhin, who has set fire to four "Ferdinands" in the course of the last few days, among them the "Ferdinand" driven by Meyer.

First of all, what is the "Ferdinand," or the "Panther," as the Germans also call it? It is the latest heavy gun just adopted by the Germans. According to the testimony of war prisoners, the Germans intended riding into Kursk on these "Panthers" and on their "Tigers" on the second day of their offensive. The "Ferdinand" has the same heavy 88 mm. gun as the "Tiger"; it does not have a revolving turret, is even less manœuvrable and is extremely heavy, weighing seventy tons.

Yerokhin, who set fire to four such "Ferdinands," is a twenty-four-year-old well-built lad of medium height, with a sunburned face, merry grey eyes and a mischievous air, which has remained with him from the days when he, an orphan, kept running away from children's homes and wandering from one to another of them. He is a real Russian, jolly, with those unquenchable high spirits which frequently combine eternal enthusiasm with keen intelligence. He always volunteers for the most dangerous missions and carries them out with great shrewdness and caution. It is this combination of these two qualities that made it possible for him to do more mischief to the Germans in the last few days than any of the others in his unit. At present he is feeling very satisfied with the fact that in spite of everything he has found the way to set fire to the seemingly invulnerable German machines. He is simply on fire with eagerness to tell about this as quickly and as precisely as possible.

It is comparatively quiet here today, and Yerokhin is trying to sum up the results of the fighting for himself. It may be that tomorrow at dawn he will again have to battle against the "Ferdinands" and he feels that he must do this even better, more cleverly and ingeniously. In telling the story, he becomes excited and lives through everything from the very beginning, talking with the special talent that makes the listener think he is sitting together with the teller of the tale in the tank and firing together with him. Listening to him, one involuntarily builds up the whole picture of the battle step by step. I have nothing to add to his story. I am giving it as I took it down from Yerokhin's own words, from the first to the last sentence.

"When the Germans started their offensive and we set out for our forming up place in the evening, I was driving the front tank and led the advance party. I would be the first to encounter the Germans, and I must say that I was glad of it. Our task was to engage the Germans and by holding them in this encounter to cover the deployment of the battalion. Artillery was already roaring all around, but the German tanks were not yet visible.

"Suddenly someone began to fire at our tank, apparently point-blank. Turning slightly I drove into the underbrush. Once there I climbed into the turret and looked out. Ahead of us, some kilometre and a half away, I saw a German tank coming up from behind a ridge. Actually I wasn't sure it was a tank at first glance. It really wasn't a tank, but I must say it was a pretty stout-looking affair. And judging by the way the shells were coming over it wasn't too bad as far as firing went either.

"Well, what do you say, Stepanenko,' I said to the turretman. 'Let's have a try.'

"The range was about 1,400 metres. It was possible to score a hit, and so we fired the first shot.

"I hit the German square in front, but I could see that it had had no effect. He neither went up in smoke nor halted. All that happened was that he began slowly to back out. The second shell was a miss, while the third hit him head-on again, and once more with no result. Then I manœuvred between the bushes, came out a little to the side and began to hammer him with shell after shell. In moving back he kept turning towards me sideways more and more, and my shells kept hitting at the very best angle. The sixth time he didn't really burst into flames but still a light smoke began to rise. It was good to see that. I sent two more shells after him when he had already dipped behind a hill. A few minutes later we saw that he was on fire all the same.

"The road is clear,' I transmitted to my comrades by wireless, and the battalion began to deploy, occupying previously prepared positions on the right and left in order to support the infantry in case of a German attack.

"Soon, to the right of the column of smoke, which we could see clearly, more German tanks made their appearance. The first of them crested a hill. The whole company immediately sent out a volley, and the tank stopped short, evidently damaged. The others deployed, facing us, and opened fire from where they were standing. Obtaining permission from the commander, I moved off to the left, taking cover behind the bushes and risings in the ground, in order to try to take the Germans in the flank. I succeeded in getting round, and there I crested a height, took a good look around, checked the range and without losing any more time sent five shells flying, one after the other,

at the nearest German tank. At the fifth shell it flared up. The other tanks immediately went into reverse and began to back out, because their position proved unfavourable when I attacked them from the flank as their turrets did not revolve. If they turned and fired at me they would be exposing their sides to our other tanks; on the other hand, if they remained in their former position then I could go on firing at their sides without any danger to myself. Therefore they began to crawl back. By this time it had begun to grow dark and the attack of the Germans had fallen through.

"By night everything was quiet. Our tanks remained in their positions, but turretman Stepanenko and I decided to go and have a look at the queer tank that had been the first to be crippled. When we reached it we saw that four of our shells had penetrated into the very middle of its armour-plating, above the chassis, making big holes but not piercing it through and through because the range was 1,400 metres.

"Nevertheless, it had been set on fire. How had that happened? We climbed inside through the round hatch in the back and there we discovered the reason. Inside this 'Panther,' right where my shells had hit, were reserve gasoline tanks. Most likely the terrific impact and the repercussion had caused the gasoline to explode and the 'Panther' had blazed up even though it had not been pierced by a shell. I examined the armour of this 'Panther' and was convinced that a shell fired from a tank would really not damage it in front, but that it was possible to go through the side at close range. Even at long range however, it was best to aim at the side, against the gasoline tanks, and in that case the 'Panther' would just hum a little swan song.

"That night we made the necessary repairs, filled up the fuel tanks and so on, and calmly sat down to wait for morning, talking over how best to fight against the 'Panthers.' In the morning the Germans launched a new attack. Twelve 'Panthers' went in front, followed by serried ranks of tommy-gunners. Some of our tanks began to mow down the German infantry, while Lieutenant Chernyega, company commander, and I took up a position behind a ridge that we had picked out that night and there began to wait until the German tanks would push ahead a little more and present their sides to our fire.

"Even before we fired our first volley, two 'Panthers' had already given up the ghost, having run afoul of some mines. Seems our sappers had laid some pretty good mines there. I never saw so little remain of a tank as remained of those two 'Panthers.' They literally flew to bits. Most likely this made an impression on the other German crews, for they slowed up. That was all we needed. We took them in the flank and set fire to two more 'Panthers.' Then we wrecked the caterpillars of two more, bringing them to a halt. The others, reversing, withdrew. Following on them and overtaking them, the tommy-gunners rolled back.

"The Germans did nothing more on our sector that day. When night fell I was sent to the left flank to set up an ambush. I chose some convenient bushes and took cover there. There I remained for six hours. And still the Germans did not show up. I had a smoke with the Lieutenant, commander of the rifle company stationed nearby, came to an agreement with him about joint operations in case the Germans would attack us, and calmly waited for events to develop. I felt that even though I had not yet got the hang of how to bag these 'Panthers,' still I was beginning to catch on.

"In front of us stood one of our medium tanks that had been crippled. At two-thirty, two tanks began to move up to it: an old German self-propelled gun and a medium tank, a 'T-IV.' The gun remained at the foot of the hill, apparently to serve as a cover, while the tank crept up close to ours. Its crew raised the upper hatch and lowered their gun. From the distance it looked as if there were two wrecked machines here. Most likely this panzer had crawled here in order to camouflage itself and observe our movements. Losing no time I returned to my tank, chose a place from which it would be possible to fire, and drove up to the spot without being noticed. But in that very instant a 'Panther' unexpectedly popped up on the hill to the right and immediately opened fire on our tanks, which were on my right.

"I must tell you straight that it certainly looked as if an experienced German was sitting in that 'Panther': with the very first shot he set fire to one of our light tanks and with the second he wrecked another, which my friend Lieutenant Sabitov was driving. I did not let him make a third shot. I was bent on getting this 'Panther.' I fired several shots in rapid succession. Most of them, as it proved later, hit home. After the second hit the 'Panther' fell silent, and after the fourth, the upper hatch opened and five members of the crew jumped to the ground. But having made up my mind to see the thing through to the end, I continued to fire until the 'Panther' caught fire properly. Then I drove our tank off to cover and together with the turretman crept back to the ridge in order to see what the German looked like. Everything was hunky-dory. It was burning away properly, full blaze. Incidentally, two German mechanics who had not managed to jump out were burned to death in this 'Panther.'

"Take now. The Germans fire all right, but they do not attack us. I've already done for four 'Panthers.' But in my opinion if you use your brains a bit before a fight you can set fire to them not one at a time but in batches. All you have to do is remember that it's no good going into frontal attacks. There's no need for useless daring here. The machine is a stout fellow, and if you go for it head-on you're liable to bark your own shin. But to make up for that, it's not manoeuvrable and likes to crawl backward like a crab. When it does try to turn, it takes all of half an hour to do it in. What you have to do is go for it

full speed and send shell after shell into its side at close range. And while it's turning to face you, I tell you honestly, you can dance rings around it. Don't think I'm exaggerating, that's exactly the way it is."

The "Panther Hunter," as his comrades call Yerokhin, once again smiles with the mischievous, shrewd smile of the Russian who will somehow manage to outwit the German, to outwit him in spite of everything.

*July 16, 1943*

**BORIS GALIN**

## **On the Kursk Salient**

Captain Vasnetsov's battalion was holding the line of defence in the district of Hill No. 129. Far ahead and on either flank the fragrant, grey mint had been shaved to the very ground, but in the centre of the zone waves of dense, tall rye rippled over a mined field. The battalion had dug in deeply and skilfully, and the riotous wild flowers of July held sway over the defence zone. Vasnetsov had become as much at home in his zone as in his own house. He knew every least turn in the approaches to the hill, the little gully with the clear spring water, the field overgrown with wild rye, the birds' nests and the very blades of grass—he knew them all.

And suddenly the silence was shattered by the drone of engines and the roar of guns of all calibres. The Germans had launched an attack. Adjutant Glybochka touched Vasnetsov on the shoulder as he was dozing on a heap of hay in the corner. A lover of poetry, he said in verse:

"Dawn is breaking, the music of guns  
Is roaring overhead. . . ."

"I hear," said the Captain dryly and went off to the command post together with Lymar, his orderly.

Slowly the shadows faded, and over the field a narrow strip of dawn timidly began to grow rosy. The Captain and his orderly each looked at the field in his own way. To Vasnetsov it was a battlefield, marked off in squares with accurately calculated firing ranges. But Lymar saw a growing field and "bountiful grain." It was the outer fringe of their defences, the firing line, and at the same time it was the fringe of his native land. Beyond the defence zones lay the Ukraine. His peasant heart contracted when he saw the German tanks slowly gliding out of the dusk.

The German tanks and self-propelled guns were advancing in wedge formation, firing as they came on. Three tanks were blown up

on the mined field amidst the rye. One of them reared into the air, its iron body trembling. When the others reached the area that was being swept by the fire of our artillery, the tanks deployed and began to rush forward at top speed. It looked to Vasnetsov as if the main blow of the Germans was being directed against his zone. The enemy was attacking with a superiority of three to one, trying to push his way through Vasnetsov's zone with fire and steel. "If only we beat off this first attack!" flashed through Vasnetsov's mind.

Psychologically, everything was being decided in these minutes. If in this first hour of battle Vasnetsov's nerves and those of his men should flinch, then all would be over quickly, and the battalion would be blown from its lines like fluff. In essence this zone of his was something in the nature of a small shield whose function it was to ward off at one point of the Kursk salient a terrifically powerful and concentrated thrust by the enemy, to ward it off under all circumstances, at all costs, by any and all means. And this was how the regimental commander had put it over the telephone. It was a good thing that the Lieutenant Colonel neither threatened nor shouted, made no appeals to his better feelings, but calmly asked in a friendly voice:

"Well, how's it going with you out there in your summer home? Pretty stifling?"

And then he said simply and briefly:

"It's not all honey where I am either, old man. It's up to us to hold this line. Well, good luck to you."

The battle was swift-moving and tense to the utmost. Attack followed attack. The Germans tried to crush our line of defence by bomb blows from the air and crash thrusts from the ground. Sustaining heavy losses in men and tanks, they recoiled and again pushed forward, striving to break through to the second zone. The favourite method of German attack—to break through, dismember and disperse—did not yield the desired results. It was hard to get elbow room for manoeuvring while the first zones were holding out so staunchly. The combined and co-ordinated action of all arms, about which so much had been spoken and written in orders during the days of the lull, was vividly and fully displayed during this hour of fiery ordeal. Neighbour came to the assistance of neighbour, both by order from above and on their own initiative, in accordance with the unwritten laws of comradeship and *esprit de corps* that are born on the field of battle.

Vasnetsov felt indebted to his neighbour, whose battery of self-propelled guns was skilfully destroying enemy tanks in defence of the left flank of the zone. It was Vasnetsov who sought out the enemy infantry, mowing it down with machine-gun fire, but it was the battery which dealt with the tanks that occasionally breached our infantry's positions. He did not know the name of its commander; all he knew was its call name, "The Cliffs." And when scouts reported to him that



tanks which had broken through were advancing on "The Cliffs" gun emplacements from the rear, he sent his orderly Lymar to warn the battery of the threatening danger. Lymar left reluctantly. He was not afraid of encountering German tanks face to face, but, as an orderly, he did not want to leave his Captain, this young commander with the sensitive, girlish face whom he respected and still more loved with the stern love of a father.

"I'll be back in a tick," he said.

He crawled through the charred grass, then jumped into a trench, and at that moment a tank went for him.

Vasnetsov saw the German tank turning round and round over the trench. Someone remarked:

"It's all up with Lymar!"

The Captain turned away and led his men into a counter-attack, drawing the blow of the enemy infantry to himself and distracting it from the battery. His orderly was no longer beside him and the Captain was feeling pretty low when someone's broad hand respectfully and affectionately touched his shoulder. Quickly he turned round. It was Lymar, who had carried out his mission.

The battery again came to the support of Vasnetsov, and the tankmen also did their bit from where they were lying in ambush.

But he was powerless to help one of our tanks that had daringly plunged into a skirmish with eight German tanks. This grey, dust-covered "T-34" crippled three German tanks. Manœuvring, it disappeared behind a hillock and then attacked again. The Germans surrounded it and succeeded in setting it ablaze. The tank was in the centre of a circle of German tankmen and tommy-gunners, who were watching it burn. Suddenly the flaming tank spurred forward. It was still alive, though mortally wounded, and determined to ram the enemy. It mauled, crushed and flattened out the Nazi rabble that was rushing to and fro in terror before the fiery cascade in whose pure flames the hearts of three heroes were blazing.

. . . Only thirty-six minutes had elapsed since Vasnetsov's conversation with the regimental commander. But communications had been severed and it seemed to the Captain as if an eternity had passed. He was already thinking that he had been forgotten, but he was mistaken, for at that moment a bloodstained signaller crept up. When the Captain took the despatch case from his hand, the signaller smiled shyly and ruefully, as if he was ashamed of being seriously wounded and unable to get to his feet at such a moment, when every man was precious.

The order stated that they were to cut off the German infantry from their tanks, cut them off and hold on. The signaller's despatch case also contained leaflets with an appeal of the War Council of the Army. The leaflets were brought to the trenches together with ammunition.

While the observers kept their eyes on the field of battle, and the men prepared refills for their machine guns, changed the lubricating oil and water, someone read the leaflet aloud:

“Guardsmen, you must put everything you have into this! Not one step back. You are stronger than the Germans. You are a Russian, you are a Guardsman. Stop the enemy and win. Forward, men, for country and for Stalin!”

Yes, our men have matured, so that they can cope with these furious battles. It is not only tanks, howitzers and aircraft that are fighting, but the will power, minds and ideals of the men. One year ago, Vasnetsov had held the same lines he was holding today. At that time he was a company commander. He well remembered the July of 1942. In those days it had seemed to him that the men were fighting with their very last breath, and he was filled with a tragic sense of isolation. He had been completely cut off from his neighbours. This July of '43 was entirely different. A new feeling flooded his weary body and tense, keyed-up mind. He was cut off from his neighbour on the right; enemy tanks had appeared on his flank; but no one showed signs of panic, no one shouted “we’re cut off,” but everyone in whom there was still life fought furiously, wrathfully, tenaciously. Truth to tell there were moments when Vasnetsov himself, cut off from his companies, was unable to render them assistance, and the battle raged spontaneously while the men fought in accordance with their own common sense and initiative, and fought well, just as they did when they heard his voice and received his orders.

To cut them off and hold on, to cut them off and hold on! Captain Tylichko, a friend who had been through many a battle with Vasnetsov, had made his way to him from Regimental Headquarters. Bombs and shells were ploughing up the ground all around. One bomb burst quite close by. Vasnetsov was thrown off his feet and he felt the hot breath of the repercussion in his face. Lyman dug him out and it was with a sort of joyous amazement and delight that he felt he was still alive. He said to Tylichko:

“We’ve still got plenty of fight in us.”

Tylichko had been deafened by the explosion and was cocking his head from side to side like some bird. Alarmed and shaken Vasnetsov put his arm around his friend’s shoulders and again shouted something to the effect that they’d still be seeing many a scrap together.

“Oh, yes,” replied Tylichko, “absolutely.”

It suddenly occurred to Vasnetsov that the day would come when people would study the operations on the Kursk salient and tell how they had worn out the Germans. It made him feel good to know that he was defending a small bit of the Kursk salient. From his hill, overgrown with hazel bushes, from Hill No. 129, he sensed the sheer grandeur of the battle as a whole, into which both sides had thrown

such huge masses of men and materiel. In this battle of divisions, corps and armies, his battalion was carrying out only a tiny part of the general mission. But to a large extent it was the behaviour of the companies and battalions during the very first hours of July 5 that decided the issue of the battle as a whole.

This was fully appreciated by both sides, both by us and by our enemies. The question was: either they would push us back at one fell blow, or we would hold our ground and wear them out. According to the designs of the Germans, the mailed fist raised against the Kursk salient was to have smashed through the defences.

Captain Vasnetsov knew that history had assigned him a small part to play. In this major operation his battalion was a mere dot, a grain of sand on the bulge of the front. But his pride as an officer, his pride as a Guardsman found satisfaction in the fact that the five hundred metres at Hill No. 129 was costing the Germans dear and that they could neither crack nor swallow this nut.

The battalion had suffered losses, but their staying power continued to grow on the blood-drenched zone. The behaviour of our men clearly evinced that particular trait of the national character which young Leo Tolstoy had noticed as an artillery officer at Sevastopol, the trait that he had called the simplicity and doggedness of the Russian soldier. This trait—simplicity and doggedness—swept the Captain and his men forward in a counter-attack, hurled the men under the tanks of the enemy with grenades, inspired the artillerymen of the battery stationed behind the battalion.

And this same trait was written on the face of Vasnetsov at the critical juncture, which came at two in the afternoon, when the outcome of the battle and the fate of the zone were being decided amidst the grass that had been crushed by caterpillar tracks, in the caved-in trenches, among the charred trees, on that bright July day. He glanced at the comrades nearest him. The faces of all looked as if they had been burned to a cinder; their helmets, arms and shoulders were covered with thick dust. They were breathing heavily, as people do after having exerted themselves to the utmost at some job that has made them forget about danger, about life and death. Everything that Vasnetsov's hand touched seemed to burn: the flasks, the metal of the machine guns, the helmets, the hot ground. Black clouds of smoke and earth curtained the white-hot disc of the sun. Vasnetsov had never been noted for his love of clamouring and shouting. He gave his orders in a quiet voice, but this time he felt the situation simply demanded his saying something special. He rose to his feet and sent his men into the ninth counter-attack shouting:

“Keep your chins up, Guardsmen!”

And in this ninth attack he was wounded. He lay there, his face pressed into the parched black soil. He seemed to hear the birds calling,

"Water, water." He turned over and suddenly heard his own voice:

"Water, water."

Lymar handed him a flask. He pressed his dry, cracked lips to the aluminium mouth. Then Tylichko opened his notebook and Vasnetsov dictated his field report: the situation at the position, the casualties, the supplies of ammunition. He was silent for a while and added:

"Morale is high. We are holding the line in the district of Hill No. 129 firmly."

*July 15, 1943*

EUGENE KRIEGER

## The Men Who Forged Victory

I had occasion to be present during the successful battles of the Red Army on one sector of the Orel direction. Unexpectedly for the Germans, our troops launched an attack. At the outset of the engagement the Nazi commanders felt quite confident of themselves. This confidence of theirs was all the greater because they knew that in the course of more than a year and a half the Germans had had time to build formidable, well-planned defences on this sector, while crack troops held the first line of defence.

Our officers and men were aware of the tremendous difficulties they would have to surmount in their offensive. The first defence zone consisted of five rows of trenches with an elaborate system of communication trenches. In front of the first three rows were barbed wire entanglements supported by steel stakes, which were quick to set up and strong. The second zone consisted of three lines of trenches which linked up with the strongpoints in the villages and hamlets. Behind this was a third zone, and more and more defence zones on hills, in deep ravines and on the steep banks of rivers extended into the depths.

To all this were added mined fields. Invisible, menacing every step, they were particularly closely planted in the first zone of defence. The mines here were laid both in front of the entanglements and behind them. Everything had been done with great cunning. Most of the anti-tank mines had been planted between the first and second row of trenches in order to make it impossible for our infantry to clear them in advance. Anti-tank mines had even been planted on the breastworks. The Germans wanted to make Russian ground kill Russian people. They worked hard and extended the area of mine-fields four to five kilometres into the depths of their defences.

Moreover they had introduced something new in their defence tactics. The memory of Stalingrad had made them cautious. They are less inventive in assault today than they are in defence. The new ele-

ment that the Germans had introduced in the Orel direction might be called mobile armoured defence. On the opposite slope of the hills behind their trenches they had secretly emplaced their tanks and huge, self-propelled guns encased in heavy armour and running on caterpillars, which they called "Ferdinands." When our attacking troops appeared, the German infantry remained in the trenches, while behind their backs the tanks and "Ferdinands" crested the hill and directed a running fire on the Russian tanks and the oncoming Russian soldiers. Then they immediately took cover, diving behind the crest of the hill, elusive, lumbering armoured monsters.

There is still another novelty of the Hitler war industry that must be included in the German armoured defences. It too is on wheels, but it can quickly be dug into the ground. This new German affair resembles an iron crab. We now have a number of them in our possession so that there is no need to hurry with a description; we can examine them at our leisure, and tell about them in due course.

Thus, at the very outset of the engagement the Hitler generals had the idea firmly fixed in their heads that these German defences of 1943 were impenetrable. But subsequently things went from bad to worse. Neither the numerous rows of trenches, nor the barbed wire on their steel stakes, nor the cunningly mined obstacles, nor the new German tactics of defence with the armoured monsters that popped out and again disappeared, nor the iron crabs were able to stem the offensive of the Russians.

While the Germans were building their defences our men were studying them. Suvorov accomplished the impossible: he captured Ismail after his men had been drilled and trained to storm fortifications like those of Ismail. In 1943 the Russian generals succeeded in having every company commander know exactly what trench he was to take, what this trench looked like, and, in accordance with this, how he would have to attack. It may be that some of the younger and more inexperienced lieutenants did indeed grumble under their breaths when they were made to work out an attack on models accurately reproducing the German defences. It was a tiresome pastime. But when it came to the actual battle the lieutenants thought of their generals with gratitude. And under fire the Red Army men remembered their exacting lieutenants with kind words. The Russian army launched its offensive fully armed with the knowledge it had acquired in the course of persistent training. It smashed the German defences with valour and with brains. The course of procedure, no matter what turn the fighting would take, had been worked out to the tiniest detail and had become almost a reflex. When they encountered the fierce German barrage, the infantry did not fall to the ground but dashed ahead in order to get out of the zone of fire. If for some reason or other the tanks lagged behind, the infantry did not lose their heads but continued to push forward knowing that

at any moment the German guns would begin pounding the tanks in the rear. Thus the infantry avoided needless losses under the terrific bombardment. They had one answer for all the difficulties of the battle—to press forward. The Germans were still hugging the ground, deafened and stunned by the withering artillery preparation, when the Russian infantry jumped into their trenches. Right on the heels of the infantry came tractor-drawn guns, which opened point-blank fire on the Germans. And the German defences wavered and crashed, while a young, enthusiastic Russian general exclaimed admiringly:

“What men! Bombardment, yet they push on. The road barred, yet they push on. Tanks ahead, still they push on. Their own tanks fall behind, yet they keep pushing on and on. Our infantry are regular fellows all right!”

The artillerymen and the infantry—these are the men who forged victory in this battle. The men under Lieutenant Colonel Velichko attacked a strongly fortified hill, and were held up by fierce fire. Velichko reported over the field telephone: “Hard going. We’re encountering heavy fire from the hill. Request that you silence the enemy artillery.” The tireless Russian guns immediately replied with new volleys that shaved the crest of the hill practically clean and at 2 p.m. Velichko reported: “The hill has been taken, we are moving ahead.”

Later I saw this hill. A Hitler general formerly had one of his best observation posts here. And here, dug into the ground, were the new iron monsters of the German war industry. At first we took them for tanks. But they are something different. The wave of the offensive has swept ahead and now we have time to examine the iron crab in all its details. German war prisoners call it an armoured mobile pill-box. It consists of a steel hood fixed on wheels and drawn by a tractor. When it reaches its destination the wheels are removed and the steel hood is lowered into a previously dug pit. On the surface only the oval armoured turret thrusting forward in a cone remains visible. In front a narrow embrasure yawns. This is for the machine gun. Two periscopes rise overhead. An armour-plated door leads into the turret. This door is hermetically closed. Let us go inside. Directly in front of us are the machine gun, a small wireless set and an exhaust pipe. Along the sides are two iron benches and beside each bench something resembling bicycle pedals. By pressing the pedal with your foot you start a ventilator going that expels the gases. Here there are also two spare periscopes, a box of cartridge cases and iron racks. The armoured crab can be both a pill-box and an observation post in the fire zone.

General Kolpakchi’s men have captured no few such crabs. Before the whirlwind of the Russian offensive, these fierce new inventions of the German defences were unable to hold out, wavered and crashed. The Germans have begun to surrender by the hundreds and are being marched off by our men over territory that they have considered theirs



Soviet infantry storming German blindages

ARMEMENT



Airmen who distinguished themselves in the July battles.



Trench mortars bombard-  
ing concentrations of ene-  
my infantry





Artillery firing at Germans retreating from Orel



The first Soviet tank in the streets of Orel

for nearly two years. Now this territory strikes fear into them. Just as it was before, now too it remains Russian. There is no time to question all the prisoners. A lively, alert commander says to his scouts:

“What under the sun do I need this Oberleutnant of yours who’s been sitting in the rye for two days? For history or something? All his information was already ancient history while he was still hiding in the rye. Now what you should do is bring over that NCO you lugged out of the ‘Ferdinand’! . . .”

The battle is not over yet. The artillery is still roaring. The Russian July offensive is marching on.

*July 28, 1943*

LEONID PERVOMAIISKY

## A Flaming Soul

There is a mighty force in our people which is awakened every time danger threatens our national existence. This force, which lies dormant in the breasts of millions, may be called heroism, although it is not heroism alone. It may be called love for the true happiness of mankind and for country, but it is not love alone. Everything fine that has been born and that has matured in the human soul over the course of the century-old labour and struggle of our nation is merged in this force, a force that is the embodiment of a great public spirit. But there are people in whom the spirit of patriotic heroism finds particularly vivid expression. It is in times of trial that such people emerge from anonymity in order to accomplish their feats of valour and add to the glory of their native land.

I have in mind one such person, a horticulturist by profession who became a tankman during the war. Captain Sergei Illarionovich Velichko returned to his brigade on July fourth at noon. He had been in a base hospital for nearly a year, having been sent there with very little hope for his recovery. It was feared that at best he would remain an invalid. Yet here he was, back in the brigade again in perfect health and even somewhat stouter. He was put in command of a battalion of heavy tanks and took over his duties at once.

He spent the day in becoming acquainted with his men and materiel, while in the evening his old friends came to visit him in his dugout. The Brigade Chief of Staff, an elderly major by the name of Ivanov, brought a cherished flask of rum. The young though grey-haired company commander First Lieutenant Grishayev came with his guitar. Captain Petrukhin, a daring scout who looked like Shchors [a Ukrainian hero of the time of the Civil War. —*Tr.*] because of his beard and mous-

tache, put a bunch of spring onions on the table. After drinks had passed around once—everyone drank from the same tin mug—Lieutenant Grishayev ran his fingers through his grey hair and struck up a song on his guitar, while the others caught up the favourite song of the brigade, the song that Captain Velichko had sung when the Germans had surrounded his tank on the banks of the Don:

The reeds were swishing, the trees swaying,  
The night was dark and grey.  
One loving pair alone did stroll  
All night till break of day. . . .

The men talked long in the dugout that night, for the meeting had wakened many memories. After they had drained the flask to the last drop, the elderly Chief of Staff remarked thoughtfully, as if listening to his own words:

“We’ve spoken so much about you during the year you’ve been away, Sergei Illarionovich, both to our own men and to visitors, as well as to newspapermen, that in a way you’ve become like a figure in a legend. . . .”

The Captain grew gloomy and said reluctantly:

“Pity you did that. I didn’t really manage to do any fighting at all. . . . I was no hero. Anyone would’ve done the same if they’d been in my shoes.”

The visitors took their leave. Captain Velichko slept badly in his new quarters. He took a turn outside of the dugout, came back, and when at last he fell asleep, it seemed to him that he woke up again immediately. . . . The dugout was shaking, and dry bark was showering down onto his face from the logs overhead as he lay on his cot. He thrust his feet into his boots, threw his coat over his shoulders and went out.

In the Southwest the night sky was lit up by spurts of flame that seemed to chase each other until they merged into a solid, ghastly glow. The ground was trembling, groaning and sighing in a muffled voice, like some huge living creature suffering from the pain of the blows that were being rained down upon it.

. . . Tanks were advancing along the road in a column. The Captain was standing in the turret of his tank and watching the road, the movements, the sky. . . .

. On the right bank of the Dnieper was a hamlet called Mliyev, known to horticulturists the world over. Velichko remembered what Mliyev had looked like in the past, because he himself had been witness to its destruction and ruin. Before the war he had worked in the experimental station of the Mliyev orchards. The golden Ukrainian autumn had brought fruits that were as much the creation of the young gardener as

they were the work of Nature. Velichko had a wife and a six-year-old son, Liza and Seryozha their names were. When he thought of them his face darkened and his eyes became a dull blue, like the waters of the storm-tossed Dnieper in the autumn.

As chance would have it, in the summer of the first year of the war Sergei Velichko, horticulturist, fought against the German tanks amidst the ruins of burning Mliyev, where the rich crop of fruit weighed down the branches of his orchards.

The flames of the night conflagration lit up the tanks standing under the trees. Velichko was in his tank. The situation did not permit him to leave for a second, even though his own house was only two or three kilometres away.

At dawn the German tanks renewed their attack. Our tanks met them with fire. The roar of battle roused the former horticulturist from the fatal melancholy in which he had been plunged. He pulled himself together just in time—a shell had lodged in the turret of his tank and the gun had been put out of commission. Velichko ordered the tank driver to start up. He was not yet aware of the fact that he was going to ram the enemy, for in him all sorts of complex emotions were at play, one of which seemed to speak more loudly than all the rest. For an instant it seemed to him that it was not a young, scarcely developed sapling, but the frail defenceless body of his Seryozha crunching under the dazzlingly polished caterpillar track of the German tank in the awful silence that had suddenly fallen over the world.

“Step on it!” he shouted to the driver. “Step on the gas, Sergeant!”

From the moment that Captain Sergei Velichko crushed the German tank together with its crew under his own tank, he became a real soldier. He was jolly, sang songs and never spoke to anyone about his family. When they withdrew to a new zone, he stopped his tank beside the ruins of his house. The window panes were smashed and the ceiling had fallen in. . . . A bit of still hot metal lay in his son's bed. He removed the picture of his wife and Seryozha from the wall and fastened it in front of him in his tank.

What was there to talk about? At present he was living only in the war, living in it calmly and confidently, and tears—even tears of rage—no longer dimmed his eyes.

He was already the best company commander in his brigade when in the summer of the memorable year of 1942 the Germans damaged his tank during a fierce battle at the Don. Night descended instantly and shrouded the hill in soft shadows. Velichko had intended repairing the caterpillar in the darkness and breaking his way through to his own unit. The tank was standing on the hill where it had been hit by a shell. But the Germans were crawling up the hill, raining bullets on the tank crew and peppering them with grenades. Velichko and his crew took cover in the tank. By dawn all his ammunition had given

out. The Germans pounded on the armoured sides of the tank with their rifle butts and shouted:

“Surrender, Rus!”

Sergei Velichko wirelessly:

“Attention! Attention! Our tank is surrounded and we have no ammunition to fight our way clear. We shall die, but we will not surrender!” Then he gave the names of the tankmen who were with him and began to sing his favourite song.

The Germans thrust a grenade into the muzzle of the gun. It smashed the breech-block to smithereens. In the morning when our troops had regained the chain of hills at the Don, they dragged out the dead men from the tank, and Sergei Velichko, who by some miracle was still alive. They had patched him together again in the hospital. For nearly a year the doctors fought over him. When he was discharged from the hospital he had fully recovered, and only the scars of the numerous wounds he had sustained and of the sixteen operations he had undergone testified to what this brave man had suffered. . . .

. . . The road had ended. The tanks halted in a small grove. His memories settled in the depths of his soul like the dust raised by the tanks on the road. The present moment reclaimed Captain Velichko, who was responsible for the safety of so many tanks and men.

The men could feel the breath of battle quite close. Black fountains of earth were spouting on the horizon and merging with wreaths of multi-coloured smoke, ranging from deep purple to light grey and even pink and blue. Artillery boomed incessantly. At one end of the horizon our planes were attacking a column of advancing German tanks; in another, German bombers were trying to crush our forward position; in the centre our fighters were engaging Messerschmidts.

Lightly wounded men, the truest barometer of a battle, were marching down the road past the grove to the rear. They evaded answering questions about their wounds, but eagerly related what was happening at the forward position. They bore no resemblance whatever to the alarmed wounded men of the summer of '41 or '42. They were not afraid of tanks, spoke of encirclement contemptuously—this winter they themselves had surrounded the Germans. They had nicknamed the new German “Tiger” tank the “Lamp on Wheels,” because it burned no worse than the other German tanks.

“You can rest assured, Comrade Captain,” said an elderly, moustached Guardsman who had been wounded a little above the elbow in his right arm, “they burn like the damned. . . . Armour-piercing bullets set them ablaze, shells set them ablaze, bottles of gasoline make 'em flare up, and do they burn. . . . It's a pleasure to see!”

The whole of that day and part of the next night the battalion remained in the grove. It was past midnight when they received orders to move. They were to launch a counter-attack against the Germans

and drive them from a tiny village sprawling on the slope of a hill a few kilometres from the highway.

The men who were concentrated in a semicircle around the little village, among them Captain Velichko, had been given the important task of routing the Germans from the village, not allowing them to get to the highway, and throwing them back as far as possible from the goal they had set themselves.

The keen mind that had massed so many men and such varied arms in this place had not done so for the sake of some insignificant little village that could as easily as not have been destroyed and built up again, nor for the sake of a six metre wide strip of land that had been sprinkled with crushed stone and called a highway, but for the sake of other, more vital aims that were just as familiar to Captain Velichko as to the many thousands of other officers and men.

Their great advantage was that they understood that in this hour of dawn, at the tiny village near the highway, forces on whom a great deal depended would mass and go into action.

After a fierce artillery preparation, Captain Velichko's tanks passed through our infantry positions and launched an assault on the German positions. Then the infantry scrambled out of the trenches and followed the tanks under terrific fire of German artillery and mortars, under a hail of bullets, under the fierce blows from land and from the air. Everything merged in a chaos of smoke, flying earth, blinding flames, howling metal and the tearing wind that was also blowing West, as if it were accompanying the attacking tanks and infantry.

Yes, that morning, despite the fact that our infantry was pinned to the ground by the German artillery barrage, despite the fact that the German "Tigers" had come out to encounter our tanks, victory was marching in our ranks and the hot breath of battle was blowing through her fiery tresses. . . . Glancing out of his tank, Captain Velichko felt her breath in his face.

At that moment a shell hit the tank caterpillar and the tank swerved round, exposing its side to the Germans so that a second shell hit its gasoline tank. The flames shot out like forked lightning. One after another the tankmen jumped out of the blazing vehicle. Realizing that the shells in the tank would soon begin to explode, Velichko hugged the ground and immediately he heard a thunder and blare over his head. Rising to his feet he saw that the infantry, who had been following the tanks, were also lying on the ground, as not only his tank but several others had been crippled by German shells and were standing still on the field. . . . Victory was slipping by. It was only a matter of some three hundred metres to the little village. Just one more spurt was needed to decide the outcome of the battle.

. . . Suddenly the infantrymen lying behind the tanks saw a man all in flames rise from the ground, turn his face towards them and

raise a tommy gun over his head, shouting something. They did not at once understand what this flaming individual was shouting, but they did see how he turned in the direction of the Germans and dashed ahead completely enveloped in flames.

A momentary lull had set in at this juncture, which was destined to become the decisive moment of that day. The hundreds of eyes gazing at the burning tankman seemed to catch fire from him. The men jumped to their feet, the tankmen leapt out of their wrecked tanks, and caught up in the flames of enthusiasm and rage they dashed forward and ever forward under the hail of lead, as if the flaming spirit of a storm had suddenly risen in their midst and was leading them over the field that had been ploughed up by the red hot metal of battle....

\* \* \*

The village was taken because every one of our men did their duty, which was so truly understood by Captain Velichko and all who were in this battle. Captain Sergei Illarionovich Velichko is alive, the infantrymen quickly extinguished his burning clothes. At present he is in the hospital and will soon return to active service.

*July 28, 1943*

VLADIMIR LYASKOVSKY

## The Tsarina of the Field

"I remember the infantry  
And my dear old Company  
And you'cause you gave me a fag."

*(From a soldiers' song)*

Nineteen-year-old Christoph Leander, who comes from the village of Kirchen on the Sieg, dreamed of following in the footsteps of his papa—a travelling salesman for a mineral water company. But to the distress of father and son, Christoph was drafted, sent into the infantry and packed off to Marseilles, where new recruits were trained. At the end of June Christoph's regiment found itself around Orel. And then. . . . But Leander himself gives a fairly accurate account of his further fate:

"On July 1 our company commander, Oberleutnant Hartmann, was called to Divisional Headquarters for instructions in how to raise the fighting morale of the men. He came back very much down in the mouth, and on July 4 we received orders to attack. We, of course, hadn't the faintest idea that an attack was brewing and weren't any too happy at the prospect. After the order was read the Feldwebel told me: 'Tonight



there will be an artillery barrage all the way from the Arctic Ocean to the Kuban.' When we dashed forward towards the Russian trenches we got such a reception that I get the shivers when I think of it even now. . . ."

The battlefield which this war prisoner recalls with such trepidation looked decidedly queer. It was a hill on whose slopes steps had been cut. The men here had given these steps the name of "thresholds." Looking down at them from the crest of the hill, Sergeant Major Grigory Nemchenko, formerly a stevedore at the port of Odessa, for some reason or other compared the notched slope with the famous steps in his native city.

"Haven't any of you been in Odessa?" he asked. "Too bad. The only difference is that the steps there lead to the sea, while these lead to the Germans."

Poking his head out of the trench he began to sing in a hoarse, dreamy baritone:

"O Odessa, the pearl of the sea,  
O, Odessa knew much misery."

"Quiet over there?" asked machine-gunner Kerimov, who was dressing the wounded shoulder of his neighbour.

"They're beginning to get lively," replied Nemchenko, and ducking to the bottom of the trench he said to Private Zakharov:

"Take the machine gun to No. 3, only see that you have plenty of ammunition."

"But there are German stiffs lying around there," said Zakharov.

"Wonderful! Couldn't think of any better camouflage!"

Half an hour earlier, Private Anatoly Sheetov had been fighting on the third "threshold." He had been killed by a mortar splinter. Now he was lying in the grass, his arms rigid in a convulsive clutch around the barrel of his machine gun. Two German bodies lay on the second step. They had stretched out their arms to reach the machine gun but at that moment a couple of bullets found their mark. Nemchenko insisted that these two had been "born lucky because they managed to crawl as far as the third threshold anyway." All the other dead Germans were sprawled on the ground at the foot of the hill. It was not easy to count them. The grass hid many of them. This summer the grass has grown like wildfire in the Grel District.

The enemy had decided to storm the hill again and were shelling it. Sometimes the shells hit half-way up the hill, sometimes they landed on the crest. They were hissing like grits on a frying pan and bursting deafeningly, while the splinters swooshed through the grass and buried themselves in the ground. When the trenches caved in under a shower of earth, Nemchenko shouted:

"Everybody all right?"

He had taken over command in place of the first lieutenant who had fallen like a hero that morning. He gave orders to bandage the wounded men, of whom there were seven, while he himself kept turning the handle of the telephone apparatus furiously and shouting into the receiver:

"Axiom! Hello! Can you hear me? Odessa. Yes, yes. They've begun. They're firing from seven guns. How many infantry? About two battalions crawling up. . . . Right you are, ours are better!"

He hung up the receiver and remarked:

"The Major says that our infantry are better than theirs, boys! It's up to us to prove it and not let them get to the 'thresholds' now."

Nemchenko and his men, whose numbers were growing smaller and smaller, were in that wrought up, agitated state when a person, although prepared for battle, feels all sorts of emotions rising in his heart—both daring and misgivings, and, perhaps, even fear in face of imminent death. Only these young men in the tunics on which great patches of salt perspiration had dried in streaks knew how to keep a grip on themselves, to suppress and overcome all feelings in themselves but one—to die but never to give in to the enemy.

Nemchenko, that restless Odessa-ite, gave expression to this feeling in his own words when he said:

"We'll give them a taste of what's what, rub their noses into the ground for them. . . ."

But machine-gunner Zakharov did not utter a single word. Only his unusually black sloe-like eyes flashed. Crawling on his belly he made his way to the third step. An avalanche of Germans was rolling towards the hill. They were already so close that Nemchenko, unable to control himself, cried out to Zakharov:

"Fire, damn you!"

But Zakharov was not just being slow. No. He was simply "making a nice fat target for himself." He let the Germans come to within forty metres and only then opened fire, and such fire that the enemy surged back, scattered and added to the graveyard at the foot of the hill.

The whole day was just as tense. Now the Germans would try to come up on the left and encounter a squall of machine-gun fire, now they attempted to gain the hill from the right. But here too they were met mercilessly. Then they tried a ruse, endeavouring to make their way through a ravine and sending their motorcyclists so that they could take the stubborn infantrymen from the rear.

There were nine such desperate attempts that day, and nine times the infantry repulsed the enemy.

\* \* \*

. . . Somewhere, on the fringe of a small birch grove, is a hill that brought widespread fame to the young infantry officer Ivan Sobko.

The road had been unusually difficult. The enemy defence line, which had been breached by our troops, did not in the slightest resemble the former fortifications. This line extended all the way to Orel. For dozens of kilometres our troops pressed on under fire, smashing through more and more enemy obstacles. This offensive was an excellent test of a soldier's character. The Young Communist League organizer Suslonov, who fought beside Ivan Sobko, put it very well when he said about the offensive: "It's like an X-ray that lays your whole soul bare. It shows the stuff you're made of at once." There were days when death carried away the most reckless and daring of the men. But the machine guns did not remain orphans. It was as if the daring of a fallen man was caught up by his friends and divided up among themselves, for they continued to push ahead as impetuously as ever and repulsed the enemy counter-attacks with the same fury as had their comrades who had died heroes.

On that day counter-attacks followed one after the other. The Germans were threatened with encirclement. Machine-gunner Sobko had been given the task of "tying up the mouth of the sac" into which a large enemy unit had been driven.

"If we let even a single one get away," Sobko said to his fellow Guardsmen, "we'll be disgraced."

"But look at the forces they have," exclaimed a thickset young fellow whose cheek had been smashed to blood. "If it was only infantry, that would be another story, but they're sending tanks. . . ."

Sobko glared at him furiously.

"What's the matter with you, is this your first day at the front or something? Haven't you ever seen a tank burn?" Turning away he asked the observer: "How many are there?"

"Seven. . . . No, three more have just shown up over there. Ten, Comrade Commander!"

"And infantry?"

"In that place, a battalion. . . . In the ravine two companies. Near the road a platoon. There'll be about two battalions all together."

Sobko did not even blink an eyelash. He knew that after five counter-attacks, the infuriated Germans would stake all their forces on one card in order to break through the neck of the "sac." And in his mind's eye he seemed to see the whole inferno that was bound to break loose at any minute.

Six Junkers were the harbingers of this inferno. The planes showered the hill with small bombs. According to the calculations of the Germans, the bombs should have covered every metre of the hill. Several men were indeed wounded, but after attending to their injuries they were soon back at their places in the trenches. A detachment of men was sent to the foot of the hill. They hung grenades all about them-

selves. Among them were tank-busters. When he saw them off, Sobko had said smilingly:

"It works out to a tank for every two men. We'll have to make it lively for them. . . ."

How long this skirmish lasted, no one knows. The Guardsmen remember only how the Germans kept crawling towards the hill, how they bombarded it from artillery and mortars, how our men fell, drenched in blood, on their overheated machine guns, shouting out something before they died. And they remembered their commander, Ivan Sobko, who dashed over to a machine gun that had fallen silent just as the Germans were on the point of capturing the trenches and winning the battle.

"Feed that belt," he had shouted to Sergeant Major Ivanov, "make it snappy."

Never before had the men seen their commander in such a fierce mood. He bent over the machine gun and fired away from it so that it seemed as if it would fly to pieces at any moment. But after the enemy had been repelled, it turned out that Sobko had wiped out more Germans than any of the others. The Guardsmen lifted their heads over the edge of the trenches and stared at the slope of the hill, which was strewn with German dead. There were more than two hundred of them.

The next day the whole front was repeating the name of First Lieutenant Ivan Sobko of the Guards. His fame spread through the trenches, over the roads and through the villages.

And this vivid event seemed to add new fame to our infantry, which is justly called the "tsarina of the fields." No matter what unit you come to you will inevitably be told about remarkably touching episodes and about the valour of the infantrymen.

\* \* \*

Guards Captain Amisimov's men were storming the railway station of Zolotarevo, eighteen kilometres east of Orel. The station grounds were in ruins. Charred railway cars intertwined with wire like spiders webs lay about everywhere. A group of German machine-gunners had ensconced themselves in a cellar and were keeping our units from crossing the railway line. Thereupon the Captain ordered Corporal Baranov to get across to the main station building at any cost. There was only one road, through the outlying burned station structures, which were still smouldering. Baranov began to crawl through the ruins. From time to time he crawled over burning embers. His hands were covered with blisters and the acrid smoke ate into his eyes. It never even occurred to the Germans that anyone could possibly make their way through these smoking ruins and get at them from that side. But Bara-

nov made his way through to them and hurled two grenades into the hole that served as the entrance to the cellar. Those machine guns never fired again.

\* \* \*

At this same station the Guardsmen battled against enemy tanks. To this day the men still recall the "Kid," which was the nickname they had affectionately given to Anton Pichugin, the youngest and shortest man in the company. When heavy German tanks appeared on their sector, his friends joked: "I say, Kid, you could get there by crawling under the burdocks, no one would even notice you." When the battalion burst into the station on the heels of the enemy, the Kid suddenly dashed off to the semaphore. A crippled German tank was standing not far from there. Enemy tommy-gunners had crawled in and were firing from the shelter of its armoured walls.

"Just look at the apartment they picked for themselves," the Kid shouted back to his comrades. "I'm off to look for the key. Only open fire on the tank. I want you to distract their attention."

He appeared near the tank so unexpectedly that the four German tommy-gunners made the utmost haste to surrender when they caught sight of the grenade in his hand. The whole battalion roared with laughter as they watched the Kid bring in his prisoners, four husky German louts. Here, too, they could not refrain from making a wisecrack. Sergeant Kiselev laughed: "Don't forget to point out in the report that the station was taken by the battalion, but that the semaphore was captured by the Kid after fierce battles."

One hour later, when the battalion took up a position beyond a pond surrounded by tall slim poplars, a German tank crawled over a hillock and began to speed down towards the ravine where an emplacement was being prepared for our artillery. The Captain ordered the tank-busters to get the tank. Just as they were taking aim an explosion roared. First one, then another, then a third. And a few seconds later the hatch opened and a dense cloud of black smoke poured forth. As soon as the German tankman poked his head out, it was drilled by Sniper Rudin. The men dashed over to the tank. Right beside the caterpillar, on the trampled, blood-spattered grass, they saw the Kid. He was dead. It was he who had set fire to the tank. He had been making his way to the ravine, laying a wire to the artillerymen. The tank caterpillars had rumbled by not far off and the Kid could have remained on the ground without rising, while the tank passed, but in that case it would have crushed the guns. And the Kid had flung his grenades under the vehicle. He was so close to the tank that the fragments penetrated his chest and pierced his heart. He was buried on the bank of the pond under a poplar. The men did not have time to make a wreath but they placed a bouquet of cornflowers and daisies on his grave.

\* \* \*

Battalion Sergeant Major Nikon Tikhomirov, who had taken seven German soldiers prisoner in a village single-handed, told us:

"Of course the lot of an infantryman is a hard lot. In the winter there's the snow, and your fingers freeze to your gun; in the autumn there are the rains and the mud, and now the sun fries you to a crisp."

But this did not sound like a complaint. On the contrary, he was proud of the fact that he and his friends were coping with all these hardships and battering the enemy furiously.

"Now you take the airmen, for instance," he continued, as he rolled himself a cigarette. "What are they up against? Aircraft and ack-ack guns. And what about us?" And he began to count off on his fingers: "Artillery, aircraft, tanks, tommy guns, mines, grenades, bullets and even stones. Everything's pitted against us chaps in the infantry. But it doesn't matter. We stick it. It's my second year in the infantry. Been wounded three times, but let me tell you I'm not thinking of leaving the infantry."

July 31, 1943

ILYA EHRENBURG

## The Orel Direction

### 1. Our Calendar

In the woods, near the village of Lgov, which was recently liberated by our troops, stands a German staff automobile. In it I found a notebook. It is the diary of Hans Gerhardt, commander of the 32nd Sapper Battalion. I have perused only the last pages of this diary. Hans Gerhardt was in the region which is usually referred to in newspaper reports as—"South of Orel." On July 3 he made the following entry:

"There is something in the air. It looks like a storm. Our summer offensive should start soon. High time, too!"

Next day he wrote:

"The order has come at last: 'Prepare for action.' We are well prepared. Everything is proceeding with lightning rapidity (*blitz-schnell*). The Kursk salient has been an eyesore to us for a long time. We shall cut it off now. . . ."

On July 5 Gerhardt was still cheerful. The entry on that date reads:

"The offensive has started. We are advancing."

On July 8 he strikes a more dolorous note.

"Today things are moving more slowly. The Russians occupy splendid positions. I have lost Corporal Baumhauer and six sappers. . . ."

From that time onwards the whole tone of the diary is different. Gerhardt no longer refers to the German offensive. On July 15 he briefly noted that his battalion had been transferred, *via* Orel, to positions south of Bolkhov and added: "We must stop the Russians."

The last entry was made on July 17.

Why do I commence a story about the great deeds performed by our Army with the entries in the diary of an insignificant German officer? Because I want to remind the reader about the German offensive against the Kursk salient. Everybody remembers that the German High Command denied that it had started an offensive. The German generals had a foreboding of failure. Hans Gerhardt and tens of thousands of other Fritzes were more naive than their generals. They believed, not in their own strength, but in the potency of the calendar.

In front of me are three Germans. The oldest of them is forty-two years of age. All three were part of the baggage train attached to some repair workshops in Karachev, where they had had an easy time. But one fine day they were told: "It's time you did a bit of fighting," and they were packed off to the front lines. They were astonished to find the journey so short. "We thought that the front was ninety kilometres away," they said with a sigh, "but here it was, right close to us. . . . Good God, they have all lost their heads in Karachev!" Here they stand, weeping like babies, these three hoary-headed Fritzes. The oldest one, his hair short and bristling, says in a moaning voice: "But it's not winter now, it's summer! Who would have thought that the Russians would have started an offensive?" His tone is a mixture of sorrow and resentment. This old fogey from Darmstadt is angry with the disorderly way in which the calendar is behaving! It is now July. This is the time when the Germans should be sweeping eastward! But something incredible happened: the Russians attacked and these three were lugged from their cushy jobs in Karachev and packed off to the front lines! What did this all mean? For the life of them they cannot understand.

Evidently there are lots of things the Germans do not understand yet. They do not understand what has happened to our country, and to our Army, during the past two years of war. The German calendar is now obsolete. We are now fighting according to our own Soviet calendar. In these woods, among the aspens, birches and hazels, among all the unusually bright green vegetation of this rainy summer, Germans are hiding, cowed, wretched and starving. They have remained behind in our rear. They are not the automatic-riflemen of 1941, not "cuckoo" snipers; they are just stragglers who have strayed from their own forces, and who put their hands up at the word of command. Not so long ago the word "encirclement" lay like a stone on the heart of Russia. But "every dog has its day." We have learned to fight, and

now the Germans have learned what encirclement means. Yesterday's partisans, the inhabitants of the now liberated districts, are hunting for them in the woods. The tables are turned.

On July 11 the Germans trembled at the roar of our powerful artillery bombardment. To them it seemed that hell had been let loose. At the end of that day they congratulated each other and said: "The Russian offensive has collapsed." But what these Fritzes thought was the beginning of an offensive had been merely a reconnoitring operation! The offensive started next day, on July 12. The preliminary bombardment lasted two and a half hours, and then our infantry surged forward. The blow was swift and sudden. Our units broke through the German front on a stretch of eleven kilometres. Later, the breach was widened in spite of the churned up roads, dense woods, bogs and flooded fields.

Even in the bitter days of our reverses the Germans were obliged to admit the excellence of our artillery, but they looked down with contempt upon our retreating infantry. Today, the enemy dreads the Russian infantry. You might say that the enemy is not what he was then. True, but he is still showing fight. Even a sloppy 1943 Eritz is as good as two Bersaglieri. I would say: our infantry is different today. The best explanation of the successes we have achieved in the Orel direction is to be found in the new qualities our Red Army now possesses.

Before the offensive thorough preparation was made. The Soviet Supreme Command carefully studied the enemy's forward positions and obtained information about all the units he had at his disposal, and about all his fortifications. Our infantry went through a course of hard training. The country in our rear is similar to that in the enemy's forward positions and is intersected with the same gullies and copses. The men sweated profusely during their training, but as a result, they lost less blood in breaking through the enemy's lines.

The enemy's forward lines were defended by his 5th and 20th Tank Divisions and his 5th and 293rd Infantry Divisions. They were all shattered. Yesterday, one of the last men of the 5th Tank Division crawled out of the woods, a twenty-year-old Fritz, barely able to stand from weakness and hunger. I asked him how he liked the war, but he only waved his hand in disgust.

I want to tell you about the fate of one of these divisions, the 293rd; I think it is significant. The Germans called the 293rd Division the "Bears." It consisted of men born in Berlin, and was famous for its stubbornness in battle. "Bears hug to death," Major General Karl Arndt, the commander of the Division, had said in a speech he delivered. The Major General himself is called by his men "Bony Karl." This Division received its baptism of fire in France. On the River Asne the French struck the "Bears" a severe blow. But this was only a gentle



tap compared with what they received one day in December near Tula. Here thousands of "Bears" carpeted the ground with their bones. The Division recently received replenishments, and the following data concerning one of its battalions, which I have taken from German staff papers, will give you an idea of its composition. In the 1st Company there were only ten men who had confidently crossed the River Bug in June 1941. In the 2nd Company there were eleven, in the 3rd Company only one. In the 4th, the Staff Company, there was only one veteran. The Division was posted north of Grel. The "Bears'" numbers dwindled. To console the widows General Karl Arndt published a pamphlet entitled *The Cemetery of the Heroes of the 293rd Division*, in which he stated that this cemetery was situated near the village of Kocheti amidst very picturesque surroundings. With typical German precision "Bony Karl" related that it had taken 307 men 141 hours to dig the graves. The pamphlet contains photographs of the graves with their birchwood crosses and facsimiles of the Division's badge: a heraldic design of a bear. What happened to the "Bears," whose hug was said to have been so fatal, when our Red Army men rushed at them? They turned and ran. General Karl Arndt took the precaution to leave beforehand. The Fritzes say bitterly: "'Bony Karl' was the first to bunk." The bears' hug became bears' funk.

Our troops did not halt after breaking through the enemy's first line of defence. They pressed forward and broke through the second and third lines. The fierce fighting of the first two days ensured the success of the entire operation. I have already mentioned the benefit our men obtained from the hard training they received before the operation started. Now, I want to tell you about something else; about their ardent souls. In front of me is Dmitri Builov. He is only nineteen. When the war started he lived in a village in the Kalinin Region. He was a mere boy then. He had not read anything about the German "new order," but he saw it. He is a quiet, shy lad, but he has already laid low quite a number of Fritzes. "I was mad with them," he says. "Now we're advancing, and it seems as if a weight has been lifted from my heart. When I fire a round or two I feel better at once. . . ." Hatred of the enemy is combined with another, more lofty sentiment, namely, love of Russia, ardour, self-sacrifice and the joy which every Red Armyman feels as he passes over his native soil which only yesterday was being trampled upon by the Germans.

The German High Command placed its hopes on its aircraft. The German air force, too, is not what it was before. The best German airmen have perished. Often units of German bombers can be seen flying without protection. True, even today the German air force is formidable. Sometimes it retards the advance of our units. But it cannot stop it.

I had a talk with some airmen in charge of fighter planes. They were in high spirits, brave and confident. Every one of them felt superior

to any German airman; often this feeling decides the issue of a battle. Take young Pinchuk, for example. During this offensive he has brought down four enemy planes. The French airmen in the "Normandy" unit fight with the same valour. During the last operation they took part in they brought down seventeen enemy planes. In one of the most recent battles nine French airmen held their own against twenty-five Germans.

Along these roads the German airmen, in the summer of 1941, hunted every automobile and every tiny batch of soldiers. Now, however, the Germans bomb our immediate rear only at night. Even their insolent Messerschmidts have become more reserved. The enemy is trying to make up for this by massed bombing, and on some days his planes make as many as a total of 1,500 flights. Scores of villages have been wrecked and burnt, but the Red Army continues to advance.

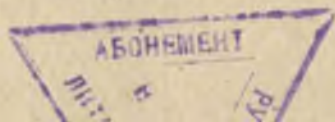
A great deal can be said about the reasons why an operation is successful; they are always as varied as the reasons why one fails. The Russian soul is as expansive, ardent and brave as ever. But skill has been added. A commander now never forgets the minute hand of his watch. Radio communication is maintained without interruption. Road work is conducted unremittently, and impassable bogs become passable. Two kilometres from the enemy, signs are put up indicating the way to this or that village. Perhaps it is precisely the expansiveness and ardour of the Russian soul that has helped our men to become precise, restrained, and exacting towards themselves.

The enemy cannot resign himself to defeat. He is bringing up more and more reserves. The 20th Tank Division and the 211th Infantry Division were wiped out, but the 10th, 25th and 110th Infantry Divisions and the 9th Tank Division have replaced them. Yesterday the 327th Infantry Division was hurled into battle straight from the march. I talked with some prisoners from the 10th Motorized Division who had not yet realized where they were. The German High Command is fully aware that the Bryansk-Orel highroad is not simply a stretch of territory, and that the offensive which Hitler launched on July 5 may end in disaster for the Germans. Hence, they try to attack us on our flanks; they hurl into battle their "T-VI Tiger" tanks and "Ferdinand" guns. Only recently these "Ferdinands" had struck Europe with awe, but today our photographers at the front are having a high time "shooting" the poor battered things. The enemy is putting up a desperate defence, but our troops are advancing, and the German prisoners of war speak with horror about the "power of the Russian guns." Today we have not only right but might on our side.

General Metz's chauffeur, now a prisoner of war, related that several days ago Field Marshal von Klügge, the Commander-in-Chief of the German Kursk-Orel group, has inspected new German lines



A Red Armyman meets his family amidst the ruins of a suburb of Orel





All that was left of the German Vandals

German prisoners of war





Soviet infantry entering suburb of Orel







A welcome to the heroic liberators



of defence. Thus, Hitler's "European fortress" is shrinking and assuming more modest proportions. . . .

The Germans had settled in the Orel Region, as they thought, firmly and for a long time. They decorated the stoves and walls of the houses in which they lived with drawings. They built arbours for the officers. They planted vegetables. I visited club houses which had stages and pianos. But the Germans fled in great haste, abandoning not only their guns and pianos, but even the photographs of their Gretchen. In one Soldiers' Club I found a poster on the wall, drawn by hand, depicting four Fritzes, portraits of the artist, in the different seasons of the year: in spring—with a bunch of flowers in his hand; in the summer—fat and perspiring; in the autumn—rather melancholy, and in the winter—with an icicle hanging from his nose. That is how it was. But it is not so now. Fritz is not fatter this summer. True, he is all of a sweat, but not because he is advancing. In spite of all the German calendars, this summer, Fritz is fleeing for his life, not across the snow, but over green grass. Probably Hitler will say: "All calendars lie."

*July 25, 1943*

## **2. At Full Height**

The historian who studies the annals of this frightful war will note with amazement that the Red Army reached maturity in the third year of the war. Usually, an army is worn out in the course of a war. Can the Fritzes of 1943 be compared with the crack divisions of the German army, which two years ago swept onwards to Pskov, Smolensk and Kiev?

What is the source of the growing strength of the Red Army? Are not our men weary after two years of heavy fighting? Have we not sustained heavy losses? I want to keep to the unvarnished truth. A soldier on active service is not ashamed of his wounds, he proudly wears his wound stripes on his breast. We know the wounds our country and our Army have sustained. But we also know that we are now stronger than the Germans. We are making them run in the summer, although the summer was considered to be the German season, and in spite of the fact that the summer is the time when the Germans can best play their trump cards—aircraft and tanks. We are stronger than the Germans not only because the Fritzes have blundered. We are stronger than they also because every commander and every private of the Red Army has matured in the course of the war. Our moral qualities—daring, sagacity and staunchness—are now being displayed in the field of war to the full. Skill is being added to valour. Self-sacrifice is being combined with self-control. What is the key to the riddle of this phenomenon? Our Army is now the nation at war. Ploughmen, carpen-

ters, agronomists and school teachers are fighting side by side with military experts. The Red Army now stands before friend and foe in all its might. The Fritz who was called to the colours in the spring of 1943 is a greenhorn in a field-grey uniform. The veteran Fritzes who have survived are mere neurasthenics. Germany was converted into a vast army barracks. Everybody and everything in that country smacked of war. The Germans marched to war after long and methodical preparation. They perfected their skill in the art of war in their summer campaigns in Belgium, in Norway and Greece. Of all paths of life they chose one—the path of war—it seemed to them the easiest. But when they encountered real hardship, when they encountered the resistance of the Red Army, they lost the taste for war. We were a peaceful people. We did not choose the path of war. War was forced upon us by the invaders. Our youth dreamed other dreams and—why should we conceal it?—our youth were not trained to hardship. Our training for this commenced in the roughest way: events plunged us into the water without a lifebelt. We were obliged to learn to fight during the years of mortal danger. And now we have genuine soldiers. After we have achieved victory they will, of course, return to their peaceful labours, but at present they look more like soldiers than all the crack troops of the world, although not so very long ago they handled not automatic rifles, but files, compasses, or pens. The woods which surround me just now saw fighting in 1941. These silent witnesses could tell an interesting tale. After the recent July fighting they can add: "The tables are turned."

Scout Smetanin is twenty years old. He was born in the Kirov Region. Before the war he was a cab driver. The war has caused him great grief: his father and elder brother were killed at the front. Smetanin did not become a scout at one stroke. With the humour of a mature adult who remembers the weaknesses of his youth, he relates how he went out to catch his first "tongue." Smetanin was not born brave, he became brave. One day this short, slim youth, brought in a German who had formerly been a prize fighter. He does not boast, he does not pose. He admits that sometimes, when the Germans drop bombs, he is conscious of fear. But he knows no fear when he is out scouting. Why? "I am armed," he says, "I have an automatic, and anti-tank grenades. . . ." He glories in this work. "It's so interesting," he says. "I get to know things before the others. Our people don't know what is happening on the other side, but I go out to see." His chest is covered with Orders and Medals, but his youthful eyes glitter more brightly than these. In them I discern inspiration. To Smetanin, scouting is poetry.

A party of six scouts commanded by Sub-Lieutenant Shishkin was cautiously making its way through a wood. Smetanin was one of the party. The men came out on a glade where they saw five Ger-



man tanks. The crews were sitting beside them on the grass. I cannot help recalling the day, long past, when an entire company of our men sometimes fled from one tank. . . . These six scouts did not run; they silently crept towards the German tankmen and opened fire on them with their automatics. Some of the Germans were killed, the rest fled. Two of the scouts were able to drive tanks. They drove two of these German tanks to the nearest village. The rest were backed into a deep ditch from which it would be impossible for the Germans to recover them. In this way these six scouts captured three "T-IV" tanks and one "T-III," and a self-propelled gun. I may be told that this was fortuitous, an isolated episode. But no! It might have been an isolated episode two years ago; but now it is part of the day's work during an offensive. I am quite aware of the existence of Guderian, of "Tigers" and "Ferdinands." But the six scouts who were not afraid of five tanks are no more fortuitous than was David, who struck down Goliath with a stone from his sling. It is courage elevated to an art; substance which has assumed form. Nor are the deeds of tank-buster Rodionov fortuitous. One day fifteen German tanks advanced against him. He set fire to four, the rest turned tail. We can say that Rodionov is a hero. But we can also say that he is—a Red Armyman, a Russian soldier of the 1943 pattern. If Hitler thought that the summer, tanks and dry roads were going to save him, he was very much mistaken. He forgot about Shishkin's scouts, about Rodionov, and many, many more Rodionovs.

"I hate 'em!" I have often heard our men say this about the Germans, but I could not conceal my joy when I heard Sub-Lieutenant Ionsyan utter these words. "I hate and despise them!" On the first day of the offensive Lieutenant Ionsyan saw the charred corpse of a Red Armyman tied to a tree in a village which his unit had helped to liberate. This was enough to rouse anybody's hatred and contempt for those who were guilty of this ghastly crime. Ionsyan is thirty-eight years old. He comes from Baku and is the mildest of men. His gaze seems introspective and concentrated, as if he were constantly analysing his own mind. But Ionsyan has learned to translate his hatred and contempt into the language of fire. He went on, followed by eight of his men. What did the nine automatic-riflemen do? They met a detachment of Germans and killed thirty-eight of them. They penetrated the enemy's rear and there killed another seventy Hitlerites and took eighteen prisoner. They captured five German guns and large stores of provisions and ammunition. "I despise them," said Ionsyan again. He hates and despises them for all their crimes: for torturing prisoners, for boasting of their strength, for devastating Europe, and for the fact that 126 "invincible" Fritzes failed to withstand nine Red Armymen.

Ionsyan is an Armenian. Here, on Orel soil, in the heart of Russia,

the sons of all the Soviet peoples are fighting side by side. Distinguished in Ionsyan's unit is Galar Ihmarbardiev, an Uzbek. One day Galar was surrounded by Germans, but he killed a dozen of them with his automatic and hand grenades and safely rejoined his unit. Vakhit Kolumbayev, a Kazakh, was also surrounded one day, but kept on fighting until he had a ring of corpses around him. He wiped out fifteen Germans. On another occasion Sergei Koshev, a Russian in this unit, attacked a group of Germans single-handed and captured thirteen of them, including an officer. Sub-Lieutenant Naum Plavnik is a Jew and commands a platoon which captured a large village which the Germans had strongly fortified. The platoon wiped out thirty Germans, of whom Plavnik himself killed five. After that he and four of his men penetrated the enemy's rear and dislodged the enemy from other positions. Here the Germans left an officer and twenty men lying dead in the field. This unity of the Soviet people in the third year of the war is the pledge of our early victory. Germany, inhabited only by Germans, is cracking up. The Bavarians, Württembergers and Badenites who are taken prisoner hasten to assure their captors that they are not Prussians. In claiming exclusive rights for one nation, namely, their own, the Hitlerites have disunited the German nation. We, prizing national variety, have created Soviet unity, with the result that neither Armenians nor Uzbeks, nor any of the other nationalities of the Soviet Union, hesitate to shed their blood for Russia.

Victory in war is the result of collective effort. A lyrical poem, a picture, a novel, depends on the talent of a single individual. An epic, an oratorio, an ancient cathedral, a tragedy is each the work of many. Among many there is always one who directs, the stage manager of events, the captain of a ship. He is to be found in every unit, in every sub-unit. He may be called the brain, the soul, but he may be called by a simpler name—the commander. In our offensive north of Orel an important role was played by the men of the rifle regiment commanded by Major Kharchenko. He is a swarthy, well-knit Southerner. He has the moustaches of a Guardsman and the eyes of a man who is accustomed to look into the hearts of men. He is only thirty-three years old, but he has seen and experienced a great deal in his short life. He was born in Stalingrad. Last autumn his aged mother waited among the ruins of that heroic city for her son, and for Russia. The Major's family hid from the Germans in a *stanitsa* (Cossack village) in the steppe. Only a month ago Kharchenko learned that his dear ones were safe. He has experienced everything that hundreds of thousands of Russians have experienced. During the bitter days of October 1941 he fought his way out of German encirclement. Major Kharchenko is now, on Orel soil, settling accounts with the Germans for all that he went through in those days.

He started in the war as a lieutenant. Before the war he was a

"vet" in a state farm. His life is totally unlike the lives of the professional soldiers of the Reichswehr who from their childhood have thought of nothing else than "pincers" and encircling movements. But Kharchenko realized that it was necessary to learn to fight, and he learned to do so in the forward lines. I do not wish to belittle the importance of the military training that a soldier receives in peace time, but in time of war military men learn everything anew. They have to forget a great deal of what they had learned before the war. Major Kharchenko studied the enemy's strategy in 1941 and 1942. He examined the Germans' plans in the same way as a watchmaker examines the works of a watch. In August 1942 he proved that he excelled the enemy in wisdom and shrewdness; his unit advanced, occupied important heights and threatened the enemy's communications. But at that time we had few commanders of this type, and it often happened that a unit, on achieving its objective, would find itself far in advance of its neighbours, and not receiving their timely support. Now, however, Kharchenko has commanders on each side of him, equally experienced as himself.

A Chevalier of the Order of Suvorov, Major Kharchenko is the plainest of men. He loves his soldiers and knows the strong and the weak sides of every one of them. He explained the art of war to me in the plainest and most expressive terms I have ever heard: "When the men understand their commander's ideas, victory is assured," he said. He is not only a strategist, but also a psychologist. He not only commands, he also explains and inspires.

I saw Major General Fedyunkin with his commanders and men two hours before the attack. His words roused the men. He led them through the intricate labyrinth of victory. It seemed that he was demanding the impossible from his subordinates, but this impossible unravelled itself, became possible, and next night appeared in the official communique as an accomplished fact. Every man felt that he was bound with his General not only by a common fate, but also by common ideas.

If we picture to ourselves the territory which the Red Army has liberated in the past two weeks and count up the losses sustained by the enemy, we will see that our successes were obtained at a relatively low price. The potency of our arms, the skill of our commanders and the intelligence and daring of our men saved thousands of lives. The Germans are continuing to offer frantic resistance. On the small sector of the front occupied by Major Kharchenko's men the Germans, in the course of one day, launched four counter-attacks, but each time they were repulsed, leaving scores and hundreds of dead on the ground, as the receding tide leaves seaweed and jetsam on the shore. Meanwhile, our forces are continuing to advance. Formerly, our men imagined that it is impossible to advance without tanks and artillery.

Now a score or so of men capture an entire village. A Guardsman said to me: "Mechanized weapons are all very well in their way, but you can't win with these alone. You have to think, look around and then act. A cool mind and a warm heart are excellent weapons too. . . ." Here, in the forward line, in these hectic days of the offensive, we see new men. The Red Army now stands before the world at its full height.

July 28, 1943

MAJOR GENERAL ANTROPOV

## The Fight for the Orel Place d'Armes

In the autumn of 1941, after long and sanguinary fighting, a vast mass of German fascist tanks and motorized infantry, supported by large numbers of aircraft and artillery, forced their way through the forests of Bryansk and advanced eastwards. Developing their offensive on several sectors of the front, the Germans directed their main forces towards Orel and other large inhabited centres in its vicinity. At the beginning of October the enemy captured Orel. Soon after, Bolkhov and Mtsensk fell. The enemy gradually gained possession of an important *place d'armes* from which he was able to threaten a number of important centres of our country to the north, east and southeast of Orel.

The German High Command attached great importance to the Orel *place d'armes*. In particular, in its plans for the capture of Moscow, it attached first-class importance to the triangle formed by Bolkhov, Mtsensk and Orel, the area of which and the advantages it provided enabled it to deploy large military concentrations for an offensive. The area of the triangle together with the adjacent districts provided the possibility of freely manoeuvring with large concentrations of heavy mechanized units and large masses of men. At the back of the Orel *place d'armes* the enemy had important railway junctions and highroads, which enabled him to establish in the immediate vicinity of the front large supply bases for armies capable of making another thrust.

Orel itself is a large junction of radial railways and highroads, branching off in all directions. The roads running parallel with the line of the front enabled the Germans to execute an extensive strategic manoeuvre. These extremely important lines of communication served as channels for supplying not only the enemy's shock group in the region of Orel, but also a number of his other groups. For many months our Intelligence Service had watched the endless stream of troops, munitions and arms flowing through the Orel-Bryansk line.

Incidentally, we might mention that last year, one of the largest German shock groups in the region of Stalingrad was provided with reinforcements largely *via* the Orel junction.

Appreciating the strategical value of the Orel *place d'armes*, the Germans did all in their power to hold it. For twenty-two months they strained all their efforts and resources to strengthen its defences, and built several fortified zones running parallel to the forward lines. The open country, intersected by gullies and river courses, and dotted with small woods, heights and hills scattered in all directions, was skilfully utilized for the purpose of building a deep and strong defence.

The Orel *place d'armes* gave the enemy many advantages, but at the same time it was constantly in jeopardy. This prompted the Germans to strengthen the sides of their triangle with exceptional speed and thoroughness and to concentrate large forces within it and in its vicinity. When the necessary lines were sufficiently fortified they began to make intense preparations for an offensive in order to utilize the strategical advantages the Orel *place d'armes* provided. This offensive was launched on July 5. The Germans concentrated their efforts on a concentric drive from the North and South, in the general direction of Kursk, for the purpose of breaking through our defence and of surrounding and annihilating the Soviet troops occupying the arc of the Kursk salient. Had they been successful they would have greatly enlarged their Orel *place d'armes*, they would have removed the danger of a flank attack from the South, and would then have been able to rush through the breach eastwards the masses of men and mechanized material they had concentrated in the region of Orel.

In launching the offensive from the Orel Region, the enemy hurled into the attack in the Orel-Kursk direction alone a total of seven tank, eleven infantry and two motorized divisions. For a whole week our troops withstood the exceptionally powerful blows of what were mainly large enemy tank formations. On one sector the Germans succeeded in making slight progress, although the battlefield was literally carpeted with thousands of dead bodies of their men and officers, with hundreds of demolished tanks and large quantities of other mechanized equipment. On the whole, however, the enemy failed to achieve any important successes, and his offensive collapsed.

In the morning of July 12, after several night attacks had been made by our bombers, which dropped heavy loads of bombs on the German defences, the Soviet troops passed to the offensive and within two days recovered the positions they had lost. Thus, the Germans' summer offensive on this sector was liquidated. Almost at the same time we started an offensive north and east of Orel. South of Orel our troops also continued to press back the enemy. On that day a fierce battle commenced, which extended over the whole of the Orel *place d'armes* and engaged vast masses of troops of all arms. In the

very first days our troops succeeded in breaking through the enemy's main defence zone in three places—south, north and east of Orel. The German defence at once showed several large fissures into which we drove a number of powerful wedges.

But the Orel *place d'armes* was undoubtedly a most formidable fortress. The numerous defence zones which they had built enabled the Germans to hold it with large forces. Everywhere they offered stubborn resistance and tried to check the advance of our troops by means of artillery fire and repeated counter-attacks. Heavy fighting raged literally on every height, and at every inhabited point. The Germans succeeded in transferring to the Orel direction several divisions, including four tank and one motorized division. Every day our forces were obliged to beat off as many as ten counter-attacks, conducted by large forces of infantry and tanks, including heavy "Tigers," supported by large numbers of aircraft. On some days the German planes made as many as 1,500 flights in the aggregate, on a narrow sector of the front.

The persistent efforts of the enemy to hold the Orel *place d'armes* at all costs explains the stubborn character of the fighting, while the specific nature of the theatre of operations determined the tactics employed. It compelled our troops to adjust themselves to the conditions of the locality. We will briefly review some of the main features of the fighting in the Orel *place d'armes*.

. As a rule, after the defence is pierced to a certain depth, the enemy's resistance either temporarily ceases or relaxes; but this was not the case here. The enemy's resistance continued unabated throughout the depth of the defence. Orel was belted by a series of defence lines spreading in all directions, from the forward positions right up to Orel. When the Germans were dislodged from some sectors, they at once manned and clung to the next. The enemy hastily deepened his defences still further and tried to check the advance of our troops by means of powerful counter-attacks, meanwhile drawing up fresh forces from the rear and placing them in previously prepared trenches. While the fighting was proceeding in front they improved these trenches, organized a system of firing positions and erected a firm anti-tank defence. To combat our tanks, the Germans brought into action all the artillery at their disposal. They even removed their anti-aircraft batteries which were protecting important objectives and put them in the field against our tanks. As a consequence, our troops encountered new defensive lines manned with fresh forces at every step in their advance.

This determined the character of our operations. We were obliged to probe for the most vulnerable points in the enemy's defences, to eat our way into them, often on very narrow sectors, in order, later on, to sap and break down the enemy's defence from within. The

enemy's centres of resistance were broken up into separate strong-points, which were then destroyed piecemeal. Extensive resort was made to the tactics of outflanking and encircling, and of striking at the enemy's flanks and rear. The issue of the battle of Mtsensk, for example, was very quickly decided by a very successful manoeuvre that was executed by our units on a neighbouring sector.

Breaking down the furious resistance of the enemy and repelling his unremitting counter-attacks, our units liberated hundreds of inhabited centres and inflicted enormous losses upon the Germans in men and material in the very first days of the battle. The success of the offensive was ensured by the splendid co-ordination of the operations of all arms, and by the skilful handling of the troops. It is sufficient to state, for example, that even during some of the most formidable enemy counter-attacks, there was not a single case of the Command temporarily losing control.

In every case without exception, once our infantry captured a position, it held it in spite of all the enemy's ferocious counter-attacks. In many cases the enemy hurled against a single company of our troops an entire battalion of infantry supported by tanks, but the company stood fast. During the battles in the Orel *place d'armes*, our infantry, in co-ordination with other arms, bore the brunt of fighting which lasted for many days at a stretch. Its concentration, impetuous attacks, its storming operations in the depths of the enemy defence and its unrelenting pursuit of the enemy largely decided the issue of every battle. As a rule, the infantry was the deciding factor in achieving success. It displayed great mobility. Employing new methods of fighting formation, it skilfully broke down the enemy's defence in spite of the latter's strength, inflicted heavy losses on the enemy, while keeping its own losses at a minimum. All the General Staff officers note the splendid work performed by the artillery, aircraft and tanks in supporting the infantry.

On July 20, our mobile forces cut the Mtsensk-Orel road and soon captured Mtsensk. The loss of Mtsensk deprived the enemy of an advantageous *place d'armes*, and of an important strongpoint which had covered Orel. This was the deepest fissure in the enemy's triangle. Soon after, as a result of heavy fighting lasting several days, our troops captured Bolkhov by closing in on it from several sides. Thus, they captured the enemy's second outpost, which covered Orel on the north.

The capture of Mtsensk and Bolkhov was an important victory for our troops. For the Germans, the loss of these two towns meant the loss of a large section of the Orel *place d'armes*, which had been so painstakingly prepared for defence for almost two years. In the course of ten days' fighting our troops captured from the enemy, lines which he had been zealously fortifying for no less than twenty-two months. But the Germans were still in possession of the Orel junction

of railways and highroads. The centre of military operations now shifted to the City of Orel itself, and to its immediate approaches. The battle of Orel commenced. This battle, too, was marked by extremely fierce and intense fighting. The Germans strained all their efforts to hold on to the aquatic lines around the city, and transferred large masses of tanks, infantry and aircraft to these positions. After making several attempts to pierce the enemy's defence east of the city, our Command arrived at the conclusion that it would be far more expedient to undertake an encircling movement. Our troops began to envelop the Orel salient, which had shrunk considerably by now, from the north and south. At once the fighting assumed unprecedented intensity.

It rained heavily during the whole period of the fighting in the Orel direction and this hindered the offensive operations of our artillery, aircraft and tanks; but even this failed to check the advance of the Red Army, which was drawing closer and closer to Orel. Our troops succeeded in breaking through the enemy defence lines, which reached back many kilometres, and in the course of its advance skilfully adjusted itself to the characteristic features of this theatre of operations. The success of our blows at the Orel *place d'armes* was determined by the exemplary organization and skilful co-ordination of all arms, the firm leadership of the forces in the course of the fighting, and the valour and irresistible *élan* of our troops.

By August 3, many of our units had broken down the enemy's resistance and on a number of sectors had reached the very outskirts of Orel. As a result of the heavy blows of our attacking forces, the enemy was compelled, on a number of sectors, to abandon his main defence lines which covered Orel, and to abandon gun emplacements, blindages and steel pill-boxes, built in accordance with the most up-to-date military engineering methods, and large quantities of guns and other war material.

On the night of August 3, our units performed a successful manoeuvre on two important sectors, and striking short but powerful blows at the enemy, inflicted another serious defeat upon him. On these sectors the enemy's defence was utterly broken down, and he began hastily to retreat. Following almost on the heels of the Germans, our forces swept towards the city and captured the outskirts from the north and east.

Street fighting began at once. All signs go to show that the Germans had intended to defend themselves within the city, for they had prepared fairly strong positions in it. They had arranged their guns in such a manner as to rake our troops as they forced their way into the city with their flanking fire. But their plans failed to materialize. Our units attacked with such impetuosity that a number of enemy strongpoints were shattered almost before the Germans could look



round; the others they abandoned as they were dislodged from street after street.

Soon our forces fought their way into the city from other directions and a considerable part of it was captured. Our troops pushed towards the centre, striking blow after blow at the enemy. Gradually, the entire city was captured. The attacks of the infantry were skilfully supported by our artillery. In particular, our light guns accompanied the infantry in their advance, and firing point blank, broke down the enemy's barricades and wiped out his centres of resistance.

The success achieved by our units operating near Orel was ensured primarily by the suddenness of their blows and by their skilful manoeuvring. The enemy put up a desperate resistance at every point, particularly on the flank zones stretching from Orel to the Southwest. Nevertheless, our troops compelled the Germans to retreat by making their positions untenable. Breaking into the depth of the enemy's defences with the aid of tanks and artillery, our infantry demolished them from within and prevented him from co-ordinating the fire and tactical operations of his individual strongpoints; everywhere they inflicted enormous losses upon him and compelled him to retreat. Our infantry displayed the same skill in the street fighting. They swiftly stormed the strongpoints into which the enemy had converted the large brick buildings in the city, penetrated into the rear of individual enemy groups, surrounded and destroyed them. In this way, winning street after street, our troops dislodged the Germans from Orel and took complete possession of it.

*August 6, 1943*

VALENTINE ANTONOV

### **Orel, August 5**

So this is it, the scene of one of the greatest battles of modern times! The land is bare, almost treeless and intersected with gullies and hollows. Derelict and ruined villages, smoking houses and trampled cornfields race past under the wings of our plane. Far ahead, in the shimmering mirage of the summer's day, loom the outlines of the city.

The fate of Orel was decided at its distant approaches. The fighting for it started long before our troops stepped into the cobblestoned streets of its suburbs. We often use the term: "line of the front," but this term is meaningless here, where the Germans tried to check our advance. It is difficult to call a line that which stretches several kilometres into the depths of a given terrain. We fly over a labyrinth of trenches,

communication trenches and trench dugouts. They stretch in all directions, in length and breadth, converge, and again diverge in different directions, forming an intricate pattern on the yellow and green chequer board of the fields and on the green velvet carpets of the meadows. This furrowed land—the forward lines of the German defence—stretches kilometre after kilometre.

From the height at which we are flying we can see another pattern woven into the green and yellow canvas. The dark patches of craters—the traces left by our bombs—the straight lines drawn by the treads of our tanks. Our artillery has gone on ahead, our bombers have flown to the West, and along the Bryansk main road our trench-mortar men are marching. These plain, silent and modest men have done their work. Their skill proved to be a match for everything the resourceful and crafty enemy could invent. Again and again he tried to stem the tide of our advance, clinging to every gully and stream, swiftly digging in, converting every stable into a firing position, parking his tanks in barns and burrowing deep into the soil like a mole. But our mighty Soviet forces dislodged him every time and pushed him further to the West, nearer and nearer to Orel.

We are now flying over the roads along which the German army is retreating. The cornfields, the scrub, and the meadows are sown with mines. Our sappers, who are clearing up these mines, can barely keep up with our troops. Near the city, which has only just been captured, there is not yet a single landing field. We land in an open field and, mounting a car, we speed along the road by which the Germans, in October 1941, counted on reaching Moscow. A stream of motor trucks, carts and people, enveloped in clouds of dust, is flowing towards the city. Glad tidings possess wonderful wings. Hundreds and thousands of refugees, who all these long months had been hiding from German rule in the villages round about, trailed in the wake of the Red Army, towards their native city.

Somebody has solicitously tacked notices to the telegraph poles with arrows pointing: "To Orel." But who, today, could mistake his way? Is it necessary to enquire for the way to the city? Today, all roads lead to Orel! From the direction of the city comes a column of war prisoners on the way to our rear. Grey with dust, these Orel Germans slouch along with drooping heads, for with the loss of the city they have lost their confidence in their "Führer."

Somebody shouts to them: "The game's up now, my beauties!" But none of them reacts to this. They continue to slouch along despondently, indifferent to the heat, and to everything around them. Suddenly one of them turns and evidently wants to say something, but he gazes at the columns of our troops speeding towards Orel, at their machines and guns, and making a gesture of despair, silently proceeds on his way.

From the wayside hands stretch out. The machines stop and the men in them catch sacks and bundles of household goods that the refugees throw to them; they are all going the same way, so why not give some a lift? We pass joyous and excited faces. A little girl throws us a bunch of flowers. An elderly woman with a happy smile on her face is standing on the kerb, giving a soldier a drink. No sooner does she return to her doorstep than others come and ask for a drink, and she gladly goes in and out of the house fetching bucket after bucket full of cold and refreshing water for the thirsty passers-by.

Suddenly an old man steps out in front of our car waving his arm. We pull up sharp. The old man shouts exultantly: "The Germans didn't get the harvest! We shall take it in! The corn will be ours!"

This is all the old man wanted to say. That is why he stopped our car. He felt impelled to express the feelings which had overcome him. He insisted that we should go into the fields and look at the corn; to see the heavy ears bending to the very ground.

A broad, well-rolled road brings us to the city. The Germans had not managed to damage it seriously. Only here and there were we obliged to leave it to skirt a blown up bridge. But the retreating Germans did not succeed in blowing up all the bridges.

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At last we reach the city. Before us deceptively looms the familiar white building of the railway station. Actually, only the walls are left: it is merely an empty brick shell. Not one of the station buildings has remained intact. The railway track is encumbered with twisted metal, felled trees and loose bricks. The rails have been carefully sawn through with German methodicalness every two or three metres.

We are in Moscow Street. The walls of the houses are plastered with German posters. On the right are the walls of what was formerly an automobile repair plant. The interior of these brick boxes that once were workshops are piled with twisted girders, heaps of metal scrap and the wreckage of automobiles. This beautiful street looks as if it has been swept by a hurricane. Ruin after ruin. All the large and important buildings have been either blown up or burned.

On the façade of the cinema theatre, the interior of which has been entirely burnt out, there is a notice in German: "Cinema for Privates." A little further down there is another place of entertainment. The sign over the door tells us that it was a privates' restaurant. Formerly, this building had been a municipal dispensary, but the German vandals had ruthlessly destroyed all the equipment of this medical institution and, under the guise of a restaurant, had converted it into a brothel. The windows of this building look out on to a garden on the trees of which the fascist butchers hanged innocent Soviet citizens.

Praskovya Ivanova, an inhabitant of this city, cannot restrain her sobs as she tells us of the horrors of the German occupation. The windows of her house also look out on this garden and she witnessed the execution of Soviet citizens—scenes which, she says, she will never forget for the rest of her life. The bodies of the executed Soviet patriots were left hanging for five days. With grief and dread gripping her heart she waited for the Germans to come for her and her son. One day she was arrested and dragged to the Gestapo. There she was beaten, kept without bread or water, and finally, failing to get any information from her, the butchers released her, a sick and broken woman. Then the fascists began to search for her son, but one night she managed to smuggle him out of the town, and right to the end of the German occupation the lad wandered from village to village under an assumed name.

In their own native city the Soviet people were humiliated at every step. The Germans had everything, the Russians nothing, except the gallows and the grave. Gallows were put up in First of May Square, in the city park, and in the square outside the railway station. Those who managed to escape torture and execution were doomed to a slow and painful death from starvation. The Germans gave the inhabitants no bread; the people roamed the countryside in an endeavour to exchange for bread their last possessions which they had managed to conceal from the marauding invaders.

Particularly sinister was the reputation enjoyed by the war prisoners' camp in Orel. This was a frightful death factory, in which men were put to death methodically and remorselessly. The camp regime was such that no human being could survive it. In the winter the prisoners, on returning from a long day of arduous toil, were driven into cells in which there were no stoves and in the windows of which there was not a single pane of glass. They were fed on mouldy soya beans and water; they were not given a crumb of bread. According to the most conservative estimates of witnesses, every day no less than fifty dead bodies were removed from the camp. In the vicinity of the brickyard and the civil aerodrome outside the city shots were heard every night. Here prisoners were brought from the Gestapo prison and shot.

The inhabitants of the city had no protection whatever; they were entirely at the mercy of every drunken German soldier. At night the city seemed to be dead, nobody was allowed to be in the streets. The people huddled in their dark, cold dens, listening to the wild orgies of the Germans. Every night the so-called Officers' Casinos were the scene of drunken carousals. Officially these were supposed to be restaurants for German officers, actually, however, they were brothels. Particularly disgusting were the orgies in the officers' restaurant in October Street.

The Germans converted this once happy, clean and cultured city of Orel into a gloomy prison for the Soviet inhabitants. The slightest infraction of the innumerable "regulations" introduced by the Germans was punished with death. Last winter, three persons were executed for failing to clear away snow when ordered to do so. They pleaded they could not go out as the German soldiers had taken their footwear from them. But the Gestapo would accept no explanation.

Recently, realizing that they would have to leave the city, the Hitlerites repeatedly rounded up the inhabitants. Hundreds of policemen, soldiers and army officers forced their way into the houses, set dogs upon women and children, bound their captives, loaded them on carts and transported them to Germany. People hid in attics and cellars, or fled to the surrounding villages, in order to escape being sent into slavery.

\* \* \*

For the first time for many months of painful fascist captivity the inhabitants of Orel went into the streets without fear. We witnessed many touching scenes in Orel today. Nobody could stay at home. Men and women embraced in the streets. Everybody eagerly invited Red Armymen to his home as honoured guests. Scores and hundreds of volunteers hied to the banks of the Oka to help the Red Armymen to build a bridge across the river and to help to get the columns of automobiles and baggage carts to the other side.

A German prisoner was being led down the main street of the city. He had been caught in a vegetable plot. A hefty lad, he walked along gloomily, furtively glancing from side to side. Children followed the guard at a respectful distance. Glances full of hatred accompanied the prisoner all the way to the City Commandant's headquarters.

I saw our men marching through the town, and from every house people came to invite them in. If a machine stopped for any reason people ran up to enquire whether they needed any assistance. Some tanks halted in the square in Moscow Street. At once a crowd gathered and the tankmen were obliged to start an impromptu meeting and answer scores of questions.

At one of the main crossroads of the city an itinerary radio station appeared. The solemn strains of our anthem were wafted over the tortured city. Within a few moments the square was filled with people reverently baring their heads. At that moment aeroplanes appeared in the sky. Somebody in the crowd, unable to restrain himself, gave vent to a loud "Hurrah!" and threw his cap into the air. The cheer was taken up by the entire crowd.

The battle of Orel will go into the history of this Patriotic War as one of its most brilliant episodes. The honour of striking the last, cul-

minating blow fell to the lot of the 5th, 129th and 380th Rifle Divisions. The Germans put up a determined resistance at the immediate approaches to the city, near the villages of Mostki and Olkhovets, where they had concentrated large masses of artillery. But the furious gunfire of the Germans failed to check the advance of our infantry and tanks. By 1 p.m. on August 4, our troops had reached the outskirts of the city. Crossing the railway, they forced their way into the eastern part of Orel.

The enemy tried to hold on to the western bank of the Oka, but after heavy street fighting our forces broke his resistance and the city passed entirely into our hands. In these battles our brave infantrymen and tankmen covered themselves with eternal glory. For example, the tank commanded by Comrade Zhemchuzhny took part in eight attacks upon the enemy. Comrade Marchenko, the commander of a company of light tanks, had his machine damaged, but he jumped to the ground, drew his revolver and shouting: "Let's be true to our colours!" dashed forward, followed by the infantry, who drove the enemy before them.

Tortured and suffering Orel is now restored to our family of Soviet cities. Once again the Red Flag waves in the translucent August sky, high above the roofs of the city.

*August 6, 1943*

**BORIS GALIN**

## **In the Battles for Belgorod**

Dawn was breaking when the Divisional Commander transferred his observation point to the chalk cliffs. Heavily built, tall, in a sweat-stained soldier's tunic, he turned his face towards the city and looked long and silently in the direction where the smoke of explosions was curling upwards. He was restrained, spoke curtly, hoarsely, but inside he was burning with impatience. This feeling was most likely shared that morning by all, from the least private to the Colonel in command: just cross the field and there it was—Belgorod. The hills were still smoking from explosions and artillery fire, wrecked cars were burning on the railway lines, and tufts of fog wreathed in the ravines. To cross the field dotted with blue flowers, amidst the sere wormwood and the trampled rye, to cut across a kilometre and a half under fire, it was this that was most difficult just now.

Guards Colonel Seryugin knew this city—the objective of their operations—only on the map. Now he saw it in real life. There it lay before him as if it were stretched out on the palm of his hand—he saw

its tile and metal roofs, its streets and lanes with the trees over which the birds were wheeling in alarm. . . . The most important thing now was to maintain the rate of the offensive, to increase the striking force of the Division. The Colonel made enquiries as to the latest developments: hending over the map, he listened to the wireless reports from the regiments, and the map came to life before his eyes. He saw the zone that had been reached by Proshunin's Regiment, Ryabtsev's assault, the outflanking movement of Serebryakov's men; he felt all the dynamics of the battle that was developing on a strip of four kilometres.

Behind the backs of the Division were the smoking ruins of the German defences, in front lay the city which the Germans had converted into a powerful stronghold. For thirty-six hours the Division had fought at the distant approaches to the city, its left flank pressed against the Severny Donet-River. On the second day, after repulsing a unit of a German division, the 89th Guards Division came up against the old, strongly fortified zone of the German defences. In accordance with the plan of the Supreme Command, the 89th Guards Division was to strike the main blow at the Germans. What worried the Germans most of all was their flanks: they knew the growing ability of the Russians in taking the enemy in pincers, dismembering and destroying him. They did not in the least expect a frontal assault, and when the 89th Guards Division, in an unexpected manoeuvre, launched a vehement attack with all three regiments, artillery fire and aircraft, driving a spearhead into the main line of the German defences, the enemy, who had not been prepared for this psychologically, wavered.

It rarely happens that the performance coincides exactly with the plan, but this time the offensive developed just as had been planned, both in time and in space. But the Colonel, fearing to tempt fate kept mumbling under his breath: "Never mind. never mind, we'll see what happens next. . . ." He took a deep breath. The air smelled of worm-wood and honey and the dizzying sweetness of clover. There was no need to urge on the men, to spur the regimental commanders, they knew what had to be done themselves. The Colonel got in touch with the regimental commanders by wireless and asked them whether they could see the city. Closest to the city was the regiment under Guards Major Proshunin—his flank was threatening the northeastern outskirts of Belgorod. Proshunin told the Divisional Commander:

"I'm going to attack the railway station."

Proshunin's tommy-gunners had already broken into the north-eastern fringe of the city when word came through that the neighbour on the right had slowed down his advance, so that the Grinovka-Pokrovka sector remained exposed. Every delay in action and decision only served to further complicate a situation which was already tense and critical enough as it was. Seryugin cursed his neighbour roundly, exclaiming irately: "That's what you call overhead expenses all

right. . . ." It was up to him to cover the exposed flank quickly and resolutely. Popov's tankmen had broken through from the direction of Byelomostnoye, but tanks alone were powerless, they had to be reinforced by infantry. The Army Commander was at the O.P. He gave the order to the Divisional Commander:

"You'll have to give them a hand, Colonel."

"Of course!" replied Seryugin. Every man was dear to him. The victory which gleamed ahead hung by a single hair; both Proshunin and Ryabtsev needed reinforcements. But he decided: Proshunin and Ryabtsev will have to get along with their own forces, the tanks will render them good service; they'll stop up the gap, and help strike at the flank. The Guardsmen of Stom's Battalion scrambled onto the tanks. The tankmen, together with the tank-borne troops, struck at the Germans from the direction of the highway.

Things were pretty crowded and lively at the O.P. But despite the lack of space, no one interfered with anyone else and work proceeded smoothly. When hot food was brought up in thermos containers, Seryugin, like a hospitable host, invited the representatives of the air arm and the artillery to share his modest meal. He glanced affectionately at quiet Captain Karpov, who was directing the operations of the aircraft in the zone of the Division's offensive. The infantry's requests were executed so quickly and so punctually that Seryugin blurted out admiringly: "To the dot!" The aircraft and the artillery operated like clockwork.

"Can do," Karpov remarked jokingly, getting in touch with his aircraft. It was as if he had taken his handkerchief out of his pocket and waved it, whereupon fighters and attack planes had immediately appeared out of the clouds, assisting the infantry to push forward.

The thirty-six hour battle showed all the officers of the Division what could be achieved given proper and skilful team work. The Divisional Commander himself derived profound satisfaction from the fact that not only the regimental commanders, but all the officers subordinate to them as well were displaying the ability to think quickly, to act daringly and to use their ingenuity during the offensive, when every minute was precious, when waiting for orders from above would spell the loss of their initiative.

At 10 a.m. Proshunin and Popov began to drive wedges into the German defences from the flanks and to surround the city, while Captain Ryabtsev attacked in the centre. The most difficult task fell to his lot: street fighting with the enemy, who had converted individual houses and entire blocks into strongly fortified points of defence. Sufficient to say, that of the 1,500 Germans wiped out by the Division, over 800 were killed in the city itself. During the lull before the offensive, Ryabtsev's Battalion had gone through a course of training in street fighting, and had studied the tactics of battles within the



confines of a city. But training is one thing, and the fierce clashes on the streets, where every house spurts fire—from roofs, from windows, from the ground—is another.

The battle raged in the streets from 10 a.m. till 3 p.m. These five hours of street fighting were the most difficult and tense hours not only for Ryabtsev and Proshunin but for the commander of the Division, who thought of only one thing: how to capture the city with the least bloodshed. He paced the trench in agitation. From time to time he stopped, now gazing at the city, now examining the gridded map, as if he wanted to penetrate with his mind to those streets, to those houses where the fate of the city and the honour and glory of the 89th Division were being decided. When a flag began to flutter over the station building he called up Proshunin and asked him breathlessly:

“That your flag?”

“Mine,” said Proshunin and reported: “I am attacking three houses. One of them, a house with a mezzanine, has got my goat already. . . .”

It was a good thing that Shpak’s battery was operating together with Proshunin. His guns followed after the assaulters and pounded the German pill-boxes at short range, destroying them and clearing the way for our infantry.

“Ryabtsev, Ryabtsev,” called the Colonel to the battalion commander over the wireless.

“I’m taking Pionerskaya Street,” replied Ryabtsev.

Captain Ryabtsev uttered these words standing near the wall of a ruined house. He was breathing heavily and mopping the streaming perspiration from his face. The radio operator with the portable wireless set and his orderly, Vereikin, were standing beside him. Suddenly a shadow flickered around the next corner. A man dropped to the ground and began to crawl forward. It was the cook, Sviridenko. He popped up from behind the wall with his thermos on his back and a tommy gun in his hand. Turning to Captain Ryabtsev he said in the same tone of voice one would use in a quiet sanatorium in peace times:

“Your breakfast is ready.”

Ryabtsev burst out laughing:

“Hold on a minute, we’ll take the city and then we’ll have breakfast.”

“Yes, but it’ll get cold,” said the cook the least bit hesitantly. But just then the orderly nudged him, pointed to third house from the corner and exclaimed abruptly: “Use your tommy gun.”

The two men—the orderly and the cook—shielded Captain Ryabtsev with their own bodies, shielded their commander from the bullets which had suddenly begun to whistle past from the direction of the third house. And it was here that Sviridenko fell. The Captain kissed his bloodstained forehead and gently lowered him to the ground.

Colonel Seryugin wirelessly reported to Proshunin that Ryabtsev was proceed-

ing in the direction of the District Soviet building. In his turn, Proshunin replied that he was making an abrupt turn to the south and was advancing along Lenin Street to join Ryabtsev. At 3 p.m. Ryabtsev reported to the Divisional Commander by radio that he had captured the building of the District Soviet.

"I'm moving to the District Soviet," said the Divisional Commander.

He found it impossibly hard to sit still on the chalk cliffs, and he transferred his O.P. to the centre of the city. From this brick building, riddled with bullets and shell splinters, he directed the operations of the regiments that were throwing the enemy over the Vezelka River. At twilight fighting was in progress for Hill No. 207.5. The Germans could still see Belgorod, from which they had been routed. They massed their whole artillery of two divisions and putting up a wall of fire tried to bar the road to the attacking 89th Division. But the Germans were already doomed: the regiments of the 89th Guards Division infiltrated from the flanks and the enemy, fearing encirclement, took to their heels and fled from the trap.

The night of the fifth was stifling and the stars twinkled uneasily in the dark sky. The glare of exploding shells lit up the river and the hills over the river. That night Guards Lance-Sergeant Karpenko, commander of a .45 gun, stood on the bank of the River Vezelka. From time to time the dark, gurgling waters seemed to flare up. He looked up at the starry sky, thought of Moscow with agitation, of Moscow which had saluted the men of Belgorod, and his thoughts flowed impetuously and eagerly into the verses that have since been adopted by the 89th Guards Division:

A stemless torrent, raging down  
You crushed the foe and swept ahead.  
Oh Guardsmen, wearing glory's crown,  
To Belgorod the way you led.

You forged ahead so stern and brave,  
The foe in mortal terror fled.  
O'er Belgorod again there waves  
The Russian Flag of deepest red.

Because you were the first to gain  
The Belgorod position  
You hear the name that Stalin gave,  
The Belgorod Division.

... We made the acquaintance of the officers of the 89th Belgorod Guards Rifle Division in the mansion that had been occupied by the

decamped German Burgomeister. Together with the orders and the field reports that gave a picture of the battle on the Belgorod *place d'armes*, we were read these simple lines that had been born in the soul of the young artilleryman. The Divisional Commander and the Chief of Staff were busy over a map. At that moment the commander's thoughts were far from Belgorod. Fighting was raging in the Kharkov direction and his militant soul was urging him there. He was already engrossed in the new operations which would devolve on the 89th Belgorod Guards Division.

The officers who were in the room were discussing the Belgorod battle in whispers. They wanted to think over, to understand and grasp what had happened, to evaluate their own operations and the operations of the enemy. What had taken place at Belgorod? Why had the Germans suffered defeat after having thrown in crack divisions, tanks, guns and aircraft for the defence of the Belgorod lines? The enemy had had a number of advantages on their side—commanding heights, and well-prepared zones of defence. What had been the trouble? One of the officers said thoughtfully:

“Something has happened to the Germans: they're the same, and yet not the same. . . .”

The Divisional Commander raised his head. “Put it the other way,” he remarked smilingly. “To blazes with those Germans. . . . It's we who have changed, and that is what's most important: it is we who are fighting better, more cleverly.” And with a brief gesture he invited the commanders to the map spread on the table: “Let's get on with it, Comrades Officers!”

*August 11, 1943*

NIKOLAI TIKHONOV

## **A Legend Shattered**

These were the finest divisions that could be picked in the German army, shock troops brought here from France, Yugoslavia and Italy, units from other fronts, re-formed and re-equipped. These were machines which the German generals regarded as invincible monsters against which all weapons would prove impotent, and the mere sight of which was calculated to strike terror into the hearts of the enemy. They were to crush everything in their way and blaze the trail for the German infantry.

A legend was attached to this army, a legend fabricated by fascist propaganda to the effect that the Soviet troops were incapable of con-

ducting a successful offensive in the summer and that only the Germans could do this successfully.

The generals who commanded this army were not the best generals of their day, but they inspected their men, their machines and guns, and were quite confident of success. It seemed to them that everything had been done to ensure it.

Once again they went over the arithmetic of the blow they intended to strike. It was very rough, but imposing arithmetic: thousands of machines and hundreds of thousands of shells concentrated on a few score of kilometres.

It seemed as though no army in the world could withstand such a blow, the like of which had never been struck before. In 1941 the enemy forces attacked on a front of nearly 3,000 kilometres. In 1942 they attacked on a front of 300 to 500 kilometres. Now they concentrated all their forces for a blow on a front of no more than 60 kilometres.

Hitler could not restrain himself from telling his men and officers that the decisive battle of this war was about to be fought. After it the Germans would only have to reap the fruits of victory and be able to rest on their laurels. The last battle of the war! This sounded like a fanfare of trumpets, it bucked up the doubters and cheered the cut-throats who manned the frightful machines which bore the names of "Tigers" and "Ferdinands."

This modern Juggernaut rushed forward, and it seemed that space itself shrank with horror. But space did not shrink with horror, it simply crouched in expectation. The men waiting in ambush with their armour-piercing rifles, the men manning the anti-tank guns, the men in the artillery positions in our forward lines, the men in the observation posts a long way ahead of our forward lines, the men in the trenches gripping their rifles, grenades and bottles of inflammable liquid watched the monster advancing and did not flinch; they knew no fear.

These were the sons of a great nation, the men and commanders of the Red Army who had sworn not to allow the enemy to pass. They entered this greatest of all battles undaunted by the monsters creeping towards them, or by the deluge of fire that was pouring down upon them. The most frightful holocausts of the past paled into insignificance compared with the fury of this battle. The field of Catalauni where the Huns of Attila fought the European forces of Aetius, the undulating expanse of Angora, where Tamerlain's Mongols fought Bajazet's Osmands for domination in Asia, the broad plains of Leipzig, where Napoleon contended for world power against the armies of the Coalition, were all minor engagements compared with the conflict which is raging here.

The land was blotted out by fire and smoke, but when the smoke had dispersed, it was found that Hitler's mighty mailed hordes had dispersed with it. Thousands of dead bodies and thousands of machines

encumbered the earth. The Germans did not pass; they could go no further.

The Red Army upset the plans and calculations of Hitler's High Command. A power had arisen which could not be broken; which struck back at the Germans. Instead of reaching Kursk, as they had set out to do, they reeled back to Orel.

Before the battle, the spokesmen of Hitler's General Staff had proclaimed to the world: "Orel is the symbol of the impregnability of Germany's defence." But before the battle had ended they hastened to proclaim that the Germans had not even thought of attacking. They were "repelling the Russian offensive." "Orel is the symbol of impregnability and invincibility."

To Orel the Germans drew all their reserves. Here they concentrated their new machines and guns. For two years Orel had been made ready for battle. Every street had been fortified. Countless numbers of fortified points were erected around the city. On the south, on the north and in the east it was belted by formidable lines of fortifications. Once again the smoke and fire of battle hung over Russian soil occupied by the invaders.

Joyous tidings sweeps from one end of our country to another. On August 5 Orel and Belgorod were captured after heavy fighting. The Red Army is pressing forward on the heels of the shattered German army, and on the heels of a shattered legend.

In his Order Marshal Stalin, Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Red Army, informed the world of the tremendous victory our gallant troops had gained. The fate of this year's summer campaign has been decided, but not in the way that Hitler had anticipated.

The divisions which were the first to break through into the cities which the Germans had fortified have been named Orel and Belgorod Divisions. The roads and trenches are congested with war material abandoned by the enemy. Thousands of German prisoners, stunned by events and unable to realize what has happened, are marching to the rear, escorted by Red Armymen.

The salvos of victory which resounded over Moscow were heard all over the country. Our joy, the joy of the entire Soviet people, is great and sublime. By their unprecedented efforts in the rear our people provided the Red Army with weapons which it converted into the weapons of victory. Never has the unity between our front and rear been so strong as it is now. Never has it been more obvious than now that blows struck simultaneously from East and West, and immediately followed up by others, are bound to inflict utter defeat on the Hitlerites. The East has struck its blow. It is now the turn of the West to strike!

The spokesmen of the German General Staff are now mumbling that the German forces have retreated from Orel according to plan,

but the world has already learned the truth. And the truth is that the new German positions north of Kharkov have also been pierced, that our offensive is continuing on a front seventy kilometres wide, and that the sound of our guns is already heard in Kharkov.

Forward! What a golden word this is! Today it rings like the death knell of the hopes of the German strategists. Legends are being shattered by the blows of the Red Army. The summer of 1943 is our summer!

The Hitlerite adventurers are bankrupt. The Red Army is advancing. The time of decisive events, of stern retribution, has arrived! The battle is spreading and reaching its climax, presaging the complete and utter collapse of Hitlerism.

*August 8, 1943*



